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A Midsummer Night's Dream

William Shakespeare

Shane Barnes & Aidan Coleman

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Introduction

Who was Shakespeare?

The Chandos Portrait of William Shakespeare

Shakespeare was neither a king nor a lord, and this is the reason we know little about him. While historians and writers made an effort to record the details of the lives of those born into noble families (kings, queens, ladies and lords), they were not generally interested in the important details of other people's lives. In his time Shakespeare was a famous playwright, but perhaps no more famous than some other London playwrights like Ben Jonson or Christopher Marlowe. Little effort was made to record the details of his life until some 50 years after his death.

Did Shakespeare write Shakespeare?

Nearly all scholars agree that we have enough evidence to confirm that William Shakespeare, the man born in Stratford-upon-Avon, was the author of the plays and poems attributed to him. However, a few other theories exist as to who wrote the plays. Some authors who have been suggested include Edward de Vere, the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford; Christopher Marlowe (a talented playwright who died in 1593 but whom conspiracy theorists claim may have faked his own death); Francis Bacon (a philosopher and scientist); and even Queen Elizabeth I.

There are a number of problems with all of these theories and very little evidence to support them. No-one doubted Shakespeare was the author of the plays and poems until 200 years after his death and these theories are usually based on the argument that Shakespeare was not university-educated.

1564	He was baptised on 26 April 1564; it is likely that he was born three days before this on 23 April (St George's Day).
1560s	William's parents, John and Anne, were possibly both illiterate (they couldn't read or write). His father, John Shakespeare, was a glove maker and was involved in a number of other business activities. He became a member of the town council when Shakespeare was very young. Shakespeare was John and Anne's third child. He had seven brothers and sisters but only five of them survived to adulthood.
1571	It is believed that Shakespeare entered the King's New Grammar School in Stratford around the age of seven. Shakespeare's school days would have begun at six in the morning in summer and seven in winter and they would have finished at five in the evening (Monday to Saturday). The school would have been very strict and students could have expected to be beaten for misbehaving or showing any signs of laziness.
1578	Shakespeare probably left school at 14 or 15. His father owed quite a few people money by this time, and, for this reason, William was unable to attend university.
1582	At age 18, he married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. They had three children – Susanna and twins Judith and Hamnet (Hamnet died when he was only 11).
1590s	We are unsure what Shakespeare did in his early twenties. There are stories of his being employed by a rich landowner in the north of England. It is possible that he joined a travelling company of actors. We do know that by the early 1590s he was a popular playwright in London; in 1594 he invested in the acting company of which he was a member (The Lord Chamberlain's Men), becoming a part-owner. Through the 1590s Shakespeare wrote a number of poems and many of his most popular plays including *Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*. He acted in some of his own plays and those of other playwrights. In 1596 Shakespeare obtained a coat of arms for his father, which meant that he would be officially regarded as a gentleman. In the following year, Shakespeare bought New Place, the second largest house in Stratford-upon-Avon.
1600s	The first decade of the 1600s was his most productive period, when he wrote most of his greatest plays, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. In 1603 Shakespeare's company became the King's Men and regularly performed at Court before King James from this time. During this decade he bought more properties around London and the Stratford area and became very wealthy.
1613	In 1613 Shakespeare returned to Stratford-upon-Avon but still travelled to London occasionally to look after his business interests.
1616	He died on his 52nd birthday (23 April 1616) and was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford.

Elizabethan England

Shakespeare arrived in London some time between 1585 and 1592. The city had a population of about 200 000 and was growing fast. It was an exciting time to live there as the city was full of foreign merchants and explorers, who were returning with spices and stories of exotic countries. It was also a time when the modern scientific method was being developed and many new discoveries were made, particularly in the areas of anatomy, mathematics and astronomy.

Unlike today, when the people of England vote for a government, England was ruled by a monarch, Elizabeth I, and her advisers. She had been Queen since 1558, six years before Shakespeare's birth. She was very popular with the people and was celebrated for her knowledge and support of literature and art.

Elizabethan society was divided into two broad groups: the 'gentle' population who governed the country (including earls, lords, ladies and gentlemen), and the 'base' or 'knaves' who made up most of the population. People were born into a certain class and marriages between people of different classes were reasonably rare. Occasionally the Queen knighted or even ennobled a person of lesser rank. While the 'gentle' were generally wealthy, some businessmen of lower rank were also beginning to make their fortunes during this time.

The Darnley Portrait of Elizabeth I, c.1570

In the 1500s, virtually everyone believed in a God who created and controlled the universe. Elizabethans believed in a divine order called the Great Chain of Being. In this way of seeing the world, God ruled the universe and below Him were a number of angels. The Queen was the highest earthly rank in the Chain of Being; beneath her were nobles and lesser lords, and below them the rest of the population. This chain extended further

Illustration from 1579 of the Great Chain of Being

to the animal and then the plant kingdoms. Such an idea was used to reinforce the class system: everything had its place in the chain and people believed that upsetting this order in any way would cause chaos. People's class was even made clear through the clothing they wore, which was governed by strict laws.

Elizabethans were quite superstitious. Many of them believed in fairies and witches whom they blamed for unexplained mishaps. Elizabethans would worry if a black cat crossed their path, and avoid walking beneath ladders because this was considered bad luck. It was generally believed that the Earth was the centre of the universe and that, in their motion around the Earth, the planets made musical notes that together formed a perfect harmony. Elizabethans believed that the constellations and other heavenly bodies, including the moon, influenced human events and held clues for the future. Even Queen Elizabeth I consulted an astrologer before deciding on the date for her coronation.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, England, like most other European countries, was Roman Catholic. Under Queen Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, the country broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and formed the Protestant Church of England. Although England briefly became Catholic again under Queen Mary, the country remained Protestant from the time of Elizabeth onwards. This meant Elizabeth I, instead of the Pope, ruled over the English Church. English priests were allowed to marry and services were carried out in English rather than Latin.

In the early 1500s there was very little confidence in the English language. Latin, the language of the Roman Catholic Church, was used for scholarship and most serious literature. However, as the century progressed, there was a new confidence that the English language could express important thoughts and feelings. A translation of the Bible into English by William Tyndale became a bestseller and was widely distributed, thanks to the reasonably recent technology of the printing press. There was also a rise in patriotism as the English became an important world power. In 1588 the English navy won a famous victory over the Spanish Armada, which was regarded as the greatest naval power in the world.

This period in history is often described as the English Renaissance (rebirth) because it was a time not only of great advances in science, but also of great achievements in art. At the centre of this achievement was the growth of the English theatres. Before 1570, acting companies toured the country, looking for work and performing in marketplaces or the inn yards at local taverns. However, during the latter part of the sixteenth century, a number of theatres were built across London to service a new population that was hungry for entertainment. By the time Shakespeare arrived in London, there were numerous theatres catering to audiences of thousands. If he had arrived in London at a different time, he might never have become the famous playwright we know him as today.

The New Globe Theatre

A day at the theatre, London 1599

Imagine you could go back to London on a Saturday afternoon in September 1599. It is a warm sunny day with a slight breeze blowing in from the country. You decide to avoid the crowds flowing over London Bridge, choosing instead to be rowed across the River Thames (pronounced *Temz*) in one of the many water taxis. There are dozens of similar boats making their way across the river from the main city to Southwark.

Southwark is a poor, overcrowded suburb filled with hastily built houses and flats. This is where immigrants from other parts of England or overseas come to live when they first arrive in London because it's cheap and no-one asks questions. It is full of workshops and young apprentices and you notice a large number of beggars. It is also the location for five of London's prisons, including that most notorious prison: the Clink.

Panorama of London by Claes Van Visscher, 1616

More importantly, Southwark is London's entertainment district. This is largely because it is outside the control of the city officials and their strict laws. The streets are packed with bowling alleys, brothels and taverns, where you can drink, or gamble illegally on dice, backgammon or cards. Here you can see all sorts of professional entertainers, from acrobats and clowns to musicians and puppeteers. You can also see some sickeningly violent entertainment. In the bear-baiting rings you are likely to see a bear or bull being attacked by vicious dogs. But you haven't crossed the river to see any of these things. You are here to see a play.

As you near the theatre, it is the smells you notice: roasting meats and pies mingle with the ever-present stench of horse dung, human sweat and sewage. Then you turn a corner, and there it is, standing 30 metres high: the Globe Theatre. The building is almost round in shape and white, criss-crossed with timbers. Above the brown thatched roof a white flag ripples in the breeze.

Interior of the New Globe Theatre

Today's play is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It's a few years old now but still very popular. You've heard that it has already been performed before the Queen last summer. It costs just a penny to enter. This is about a tenth of the average worker's daily wage, which makes it cheaper than a movie today. As you pass beneath the entrance you read the words *Totus mundus agit histrionem*: the whole world is a playhouse.

Inside, three tiers of gallery seating wrap around the stage. If you pay another penny, you can buy yourself a seat in one of the lower tiers, or for sixpence you can purchase one of the best seats in the upper galleries. This is where the upper classes sit: the gentlemen, lords and ladies.

The stage is raised about one and a half metres above the ground. Like the seats in the galleries, the performance area is covered. The ceiling, which they call the heavens, is painted with stars. You notice there are very few props of any sort and no backdrops or scenery: just a curtain at the back of the stage and, above this, three balcony areas that face the audience. These are the most expensive seats in the house, where people sit to be seen.

The Globe is now almost full with 3000 noisy people. You find a place off to the side of the stage. You'll have to stand for two or three hours but you've done that before at plenty of concerts. There are no toilets, and you will need to keep a careful eye on your bag.

The audience around you are poorer Londoners, the groundlings. You'll find they're a lot like a crowd at a football game, but rougher. They will eat, drink and talk throughout the performance and will shout out or boo if they don't like what's happening on stage.

When the actors come on you'll find they speak very quickly, but you'll be able to hear them clearly where you are. If you look very closely you may even notice something strange about the female characters. All of the parts are played by men, and female characters, like Hermia and Helena, are played by boys whose voices have not yet broken. Theatre companies are considered too dangerous for women, who won't be permitted on stage for another 60 years.

Anyway, it's almost 2 o'clock and the performance is about to begin …

Dates, sources and setting

A Midsummer Night's Dream was written around the same time as *Romeo and Juliet* – some time between 1594 and 1596. Some scholars believe the play was written and performed for a wedding that Queen Elizabeth I attended.

Shakespeare's plots generally adapt and combine existing stories. This is not the case, however, with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The plot is Shakespeare's, although some of the characters are taken from ancient myth. In Greek mythology, Theseus was an early ruler of Athens, who famously defeated the Minotaur, and Hippolyta was the Queen of the Amazons, a tribe of warrior women. A battle in which Theseus defeated Hippolyta is alluded to in the play's opening scene, and other events from Theseus' life are mentioned briefly. Shakespeare would have known of *Pyramus and Thisbe* through the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, though the story originates in Babylon (modern-day Iraq). The mischievous sprite called Puck or Robin Goodfellow is taken from English folklore.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is set in the ancient city of Athens and its surrounding woods. The action takes place in a fairytale world of magic and, in this way, does not resemble any place on earth. Midsummer Eve, occurring late in June, marks the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. It was a time of fun and festivals in Shakespeare's day.

Shakespeare's language

Shakespeare wrote with an astonishing command of the English language. His lines are packed with puns, metaphors and ironies. He often uses words and phrases that sound strange to a modern reader, and some words have shifted in meaning since Shakespeare's time. Sometimes he uses a different word order from what you might be used to, and his characters often speak in poetry. Shakespeare's language can, at times, be challenging, but the reward is in the challenge.

Below are some tips on how to read the text and some of the main features to look out for. Don't worry too much at first about terms like **iambic pentameter** and **rhyming couplet**. At this stage, practise reading the text aloud and enjoy the sound of the language.

Tips for reading

It is vital that you do not pause at the end of a line if a thought or an idea continues on to the next line. The following example from the opening lines of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* illustrates this point. Try reading it aloud, pausing at the end of each line.

[Context: Theseus informs Hippolyta how impatient he is for the arrival of their wedding day.]

THESEUS Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace: four happy days bring in
Another moon; but, O, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires … (Act 1 Scene 1)

The most natural place in these lines to pause is where there is a punctuation mark such as a comma (,) colon (:) semicolon (;) or exclamation mark (!). In this case, the natural places to pause are at the colon after 'apace', at the semicolon after 'moon', and at the exclamation mark after 'wanes'.

Read the lines again, this time pausing at punctuation marks rather than at the end of each line. You will notice that the lines flow much more smoothly now and that the meaning of the lines is clearer. Theseus is impatient, and the fact that his thoughts run from one line to the next seems to quicken the pace a little, emphasising this impatience. Pause for a little longer after 'wanes' than after 'but' and 'methinks', as a comma does not require as long a breath as an exclamation mark. The key point to remember is to pause in your reading only at punctuation marks, the same way you would when reading a novel.

The dash

In this version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the dash (–) is a specific punctuation mark. We use it to indicate **interruptions** to the flow of conversation in several ways.

a. Alternating between speaking to one character and another

[Context: Egeus complains to Theseus about his daughter (Hermia); she refuses to marry Demetrius, preferring Lysander instead. Interrupting his complaint to Theseus, Egeus commands Demetrius and then Lysander to step forward.]

EGEUS Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia –
Stand forth, Demetrius – My noble lord,
This man hath consent to marry her –
Stand forth, Lysander – and my gracious Duke … (Act 1 Scene 1)

b. Becoming sidetracked during a conversation

[Context: Bottom has just woken up from his sleep; he is not sure if what he remembers happening was real or a dream. His confusion is indicated by the dashes in the text, showing that his thoughts are jumbled and interrupted.]

BOTTOM Methought I was – there is no man can tell what – methought I was – and methought I had – but man is but a patchèd fool, if he will offer to say what methought me had … (Act 4 Scene 1)

c. Interrupting another character's dialogue

[Context: Hermia is overcome with passion that has led to frustration, and she constantly interrupts Lysander's attempts to comfort her with promises of his love. Her interruptions are indicated by dashes in the text.]

LYSANDER The course of true love never did run smooth;
But, either it was different in blood –
HERMIA O cross! Too high to be enthralled to low.
LYSANDER Or else misgraffèd in respect of years –
HERMIA O spite! Too old to be engaged to young … (Act 1 Scene 1)

The meaning of the dash (–) in the text is indicated by the context of the characters' dialogue. In all cases in this edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it signals an interruption of some sort.

Language features

a. Blank verse and iambic pentameter

Most of Shakespeare's plays are written in **blank verse**, which is unrhymed poetry written in a particular rhythm or meter known as **iambic pentameter**. Even though less than half of this play is written in blank verse, we will start with this aspect, so we can begin to understand the rhythm of the text. For example:

TITANIA I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again;
Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note,
So is mine eye enthrallèd to thy shape … (Act 3 Scene 1)

Set out like a poem (verse) rather than a novel (prose), there is something else you might notice about these lines, besides the fact that they do not rhyme. Take a moment to read them aloud. Can you hear the rhythm in the words? Read

the lines aloud once more. Can you hear the regular heartbeat repeating itself in each line?

te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM …

The general rule in Shakespeare's plays is to have ten beats per line, divided into what are called **iambs**. Each iamb contains one unstressed beat and one stressed beat (te-DUM). As each line has five iambs, this forms the rhythm called **iambic pentameter** ('penta' relates to a group of five, as in pentagon, a five-sided shape).

This pattern is made clearer below, where the CAPITALISED letters are a stressed or strong beat. They should be emphasised a little more than the weaker beats:

PUCK My MIS-tress WITH a MON-ster IS in LOVE. (Act 3 Scene 2)

Not only does Shakespeare's iambic pentameter (five te-DUMs per line) work **across** words (as in 'IS in LOVE') and **within** words (as in 'MIS-tress' and 'MON-ster'), but also **across speakers**:

HERMIA Why ARE you GROWN so RUDE? What CHANGE is THIS?
Sweet LOVE –
LYSANDER Thy LOVE! Out TAW-ny TARtar, OUT!
Out, LOATH-èd MED'-cine! HAT-ed POT-ion, HENCE!
HERMIA Do YOU not JEST –
HELENA Yes, SOOTH, and SO do YOU. (Act 3 Scene 2)

Shakespeare emphasises the conflict by having one character interrupting another character's lines. Yet, notice that, even though the dialogue is interrupted, the iambic pentameter remains consistent. This is shown in the text by indenting the characters' lines. Those reading the parts of Lysander and Helena in this case should speak immediately after Hermia to complete the rhythm of the line. In this way, the heart of the play does not stop beating.

You will not necessarily be able to pick this rhythm straight away, but the more you read Shakespeare, the more you will develop a feel for iambic pentameter.

b. Rhyme

Despite the importance of blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter) in Shakespeare's plays, about half of the lines in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are written in **rhyming verse**. There are several different forms of rhyming verse used throughout the play, mostly depending on which group of characters is speaking.

i. The lovers

DEMETRIUS O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!
To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?
Crystal is muddy. O, how ripe in show
Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow! (Act 3 Scene 2)

The four lovers (Demetrius, Hermia, Lysander and Helena) often, but not always, speak to each other in **rhyming couplets** (two consecutive lines that rhyme). Shakespeare emphasises the passion of the lovers by having them speak in this highly poetic form. This is especially the case when they are under the influence of the love potion. Note, too, that the rhyming couplets are still in iambic pentameter.

ii. The fairies

PUCK If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear. (Act 5 Scene 1)

Perhaps to emphasise their difference from the human world, Shakespeare's fairies speak in a variety of poetic forms: sometimes in blank verse, sometimes rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter, and at other times in rhyming verse with no iambic pentameter. The rhythm of the lines above (DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM te-) is known as **trochaic tetrameter**. In fact, the third and fourth lines have only seven beats, and use a very rare meter known as **catalectic trochaic tetrameter** – they have a beat missing at the end of each line (DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM, te-DUM). These are only some of the ways the fairies speak in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

iii. The mechanicals

BOTTOM The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates … (Act 1 Scene 2)

The mechanicals are tradesmen who are also amateur actors. Many of their lines are in prose (see below), but when they perform their play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, they speak in verse (poetry). To emphasise how terrible they are as actors (and they are terrible), Shakespeare writes the mechanicals' lines in awful, artificial and exaggerated rhyme. This also adds to the comedy of their scenes.

c. Prose

While most of Shakespeare's plays are written in verse, he sometimes chooses to have his characters speak in prose. This is the sort of writing found in novels; it is how we naturally speak and think, and it does not necessarily have a clear rhythm.

BOTTOM Let me play the lion too. I will roar, that I will do any man's heart good to hear me; I will roar, that I will make the Duke say, 'Let him roar again! Let him roar again!'

QUINCE If you should do it too terribly, you would fright the Duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek; and that were enough to hang us all.

ALL That would hang us, every mother's son. (Act 1 Scene 2)

Prose often (but not always) indicates that a character is of a lower class. Here, Bottom and Quince are tradesmen who are also actors; they are clearly of a lower class than the Duke and Duchess. However, in Act 5, the Duke speaks in prose to the mechanicals – perhaps attempting to address them in everyday language to make them feel at ease. Prose in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems to have more to do with the context and nature of what the characters are saying than their class. Regardless, in contrast to verse, prose passages tend to be less formal and more chatty.

d. Dramatic pauses

An aspect of Shakespeare's plays that you are sure to notice is the occurrence of lines that do not strictly adhere to the typical use of iambic pentameter. The rhythm of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is very regular, but rare interruptions do occur. For example, Shakespeare sometimes leaves a line of iambic pentameter incomplete, breaking the rhythm of the text:

HERMIA If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep,
Being over shoes in blood, plunge in the deep,
And kill me too. (Act 3 Scene 2)

These irregular lines are constructed on purpose by Shakespeare to highlight aspects such as dramatic tension. Leaving the line with fewer than the usual ten beats allows time for the characters to pause or perhaps to do something during the moment of silence. Here it allows time for Hermia to show that she is overcome with emotion: she thinks something terrible has happened to Lysander, whom she loves. The pause in the dialogue adds discord or tension to the scene.

e. Contractions and accents

Shakespeare frequently uses **contractions** in order to preserve the rhythm of iambic pentameter. Contractions are shortened words. You use contractions such as don't (do not) and haven't (have not) in everyday speech. In each of these examples, an apostrophe indicates that something is missing, that the word has been shortened:

'tis (it is) giv'n (given) o'er (over) wak'st (wakest)

At other times, Shakespeare *adds* a syllable or a beat to a word to make it fit the iambic pentameter. This is indicated in the text by an accent mark to make an extra syllable:

blessèd [BLESS-ed] (two beats instead of one)
congealèd [con-GEAL-ed] (three beats instead of two)

Be on the lookout for the great variety of language forms throughout the play: blank verse, rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter, trochaic tetrameter, terrible poetry, and even short songs and spells. And remember, the rich variation in language is used by Shakespeare to show the range of characters and even the assortment of worlds that make up *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Important vocabulary

Shakespeare's works use an incredibly wide vocabulary; some scholars have estimated that his plays and poems make use of up to 15 000 different words. You can enjoy Shakespeare without understanding every word, but it is still a good idea to learn the words that are used regularly throughout the play. Some of the words like 'wit' and 'dote' are still used today, but others like 'ere' or 'ay' are not used as often.

You might like to begin a vocabulary list of your own. Here are some words that occur frequently throughout *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Anon: Soon
Ay (pronounced *eye*): Yes
Chide / Chid: To tell off or criticise someone
Dote (on): Be in love or infatuated (with someone); can also mean to behave foolishly
Dotage: State of being in love; infatuation
Entreat: Beg or request forcefully (beseech)
Ere (pronounced *air*): Before
Hence: Away from here
Solemnity: Celebration or festivity
Solemnly: Ceremoniously (this word suggested joy and pleasure in Shakespeare's day)
Thou: You
Thy: Your
Wherefore: Why
Wit: Intelligence
Woo: Win over or persuade (in matters of love)

The characters

THE ATHENIAN COURT	
	Pronunciation of characters' names
THESEUS: Duke (ruler) of Athens	Thee-see-us
HIPPOLYTA: Queen of the Amazons; engaged to Theseus	Hip-pol-i-tar
EGEUS: Noble in Theseus' court; father of Hermia	Ee-jee-us
PHILOSTRATE: Master of the Revels (in charge of royal entertainment)	Phil-o-strar-tay
Attendants and Lords of the court	

THE LOVERS	
	Pronunciation of characters' names
HERMIA: Daughter of Egeus; in love with Lysander (short with dark hair)	Her-me-ar
LYSANDER & DEMETRIUS: Rich young men, both in love with Hermia	Lie-sand-ar, Der-me-tree-us
HELENA: Rich young lady, in love with Demetrius (tall with blonde hair)	

THE MECHANICALS (TRADESMEN / ACTORS)	
Parts played in *Pyramus and Thisbe* are in red	*Pronunciation of characters' names*
PETER QUINCE: Carpenter (Director) **Prologue**	Pro-log
NICK BOTTOM: Weaver **Pyramus**	Pi-rar-mus
FRANCIS FLUTE: Bellows-maker **Thisbe**	Thiz-bee
TOM SNOUT: Tinker **Wall**	
ROBIN STARVELING: Tailor **Moon**	
SNUG: Joiner **Lion**	

FAIRY KINGDOM	
	Pronunciation of characters' names
OBERON: King of the Fairies	Oh-bar-ron
TITANIA: Queen of the Fairies	Ti-tan-yar
PUCK: Mischievous servant of Oberon, also known as Robin Goodfellow	
PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH & MUSTARDSEED: Servant fairies to Titania	Peeze-blossom
Other unnamed fairies and attendants to Oberon and Titania	

Act summaries for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Act 1

It is four days before the wedding of Theseus, the Duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, the Queen of the Amazons. Egeus brings his daughter, Hermia, before Theseus with two rivals for her love: Lysander, whom she loves, and Demetrius, whom she does not. Egeus insists that his daughter marry Demetrius and, if she refuses, demands that she should die for disobedience, in accordance with the law. Theseus presents Hermia with three choices: marry Demetrius, be put to death, or live the life of a nun. To escape this harsh ruling, Hermia and Lysander make plans to leave Athens the following night. Foolishly, they tell Helena of these plans. Helena is in love with Demetrius and decides to tell him of the elopement, hoping to win his affection. In another part of town, a group of tradesmen rehearse a play they wish to perform for Theseus' wedding night celebrations.

Act 2

In a forest near Athens, we are introduced to a mischievous spirit called Puck or Robin Goodfellow, and also to Oberon and Titania, the King and Queen of the Fairies, who are fighting over possession of a young boy stolen from India. Titania insists that she should keep the child as she was a friend of the boy's now-dead mother. Oberon refuses to accept this argument and, after Titania leaves, threatens to take revenge. Invisible to the humans, Oberon witnesses Demetrius and Helena arguing, with Demetrius protesting that he cannot love her. Oberon commands Puck to fetch him a certain flower, the juice of which, when applied to anyone's eyes, makes them fall in love with the next living creature they see. He sends Puck to apply this potion to Demetrius' eyes so that he will fall in love with Helena. While Titania is sleeping, Oberon applies the flower's nectar to her eyelids, in the hope that she will fall in love with some hideous creature. Meanwhile, Puck stumbles upon Hermia and Lysander resting in the forest. Mistaking Lysander for Demetrius, Puck applies the flower's juice to Lysander's eyes; when awoken by Helena, Lysander falls in love with her.

Act 3

The tradesmen meet in the woods to rehearse their play. During the rehearsal, Puck magically gives Bottom, one of the actors, a donkey's head, and all the others run away in fright. To show that he is not afraid, Bottom walks up and down singing, waking Titania who, under the flower's spell, instantly falls in love with him. She commands her fairies to attend to his every need and insists that he stay with her in the woods. Unseen, Oberon and Puck witness Demetrius and Hermia arguing. When Demetrius gives up following Hermia and lies down to sleep, Oberon applies the flower's juice to his eyelids. A temporary situation results in which both Lysander and Demetrius love Helena, but she assumes they are mocking her. Hermia arrives and accuses Helena of stealing Lysander's heart. The two men start fighting over the right to woo Helena. To fix the situation, Oberon commands Puck to create a fog to keep the rivals safe from each other and to lead them through the forest until they are exhausted. Eventually, Helena, Hermia, Demetrius and Lysander lie down to sleep and Puck fixes things so that Demetrius will love Helena and Lysander will return to loving Hermia.

Act 4

Titania gives Oberon the stolen boy and Oberon restores her to her former state. While Theseus and Hippolyta are out hunting, they come across the sleeping pairs of lovers. Egeus demands Lysander be punished for trying to escape the Athenian law but Demetrius makes it clear that he now loves Helena instead of Hermia. Against Egeus' wishes, Theseus invites the two couples to join him and Hippolyta in a triple wedding later that day. Back in Athens, the tradesmen/actors are despairing that they will never see their lead actor Bottom again, but he returns, fully human, and urges them to ready themselves for the play.

Act 5

After the wedding, Theseus chooses to view the play that the tradesmen have been rehearsing. The acting and the script are exceedingly bad and the couples make fun of the actors. After the couples have gone to bed, Oberon and Titania enter to bless the couples and their future children. Puck apologises to the audience for any offence and bids them good night.

Quick questions!

QUESTIONS

Spend a few minutes answering these questions in pairs or as a class.

1 Which two characters are to be married in four days' time?
2 Whom does Hermia love?
3 To which character has Hermia's father given his consent to marry his daughter?
4 With what three choices is Hermia presented?
5 What do Hermia and Lysander decide to do to escape the Athenian law?
6 Whom do they tell of their plans?
7 Who else does Helena tell of these plans?
8 Why are the tradesmen rehearsing a play?
9 What are Oberon and Titania fighting over?
10 Why does Titania think she should keep the child?
11 What is Demetrius' attitude towards Helena?
12 What effect does the flower that Puck fetches have on people when its juice is applied to their eyes?
13 Why does Oberon apply the flower to Titania's eyes?
14 To what character does Puck give the head of a donkey?
15 Why does Titania temporarily fall in love with Bottom?
16 What is Helena's attitude to both Demetrius and Lysander falling in love with her?
17 Why does Oberon command Puck to create a thick fog?
18 Who ends up keeping the child that Oberon and Titania were arguing over?
19 What are Theseus and Hippolyta doing when they come across the sleeping lovers?
20 Whom does Demetrius love at the end of the play?
21 What does Theseus invite the two couples to do?
22 Why does the tradesmen/actors' despair turn to joy at the end of Act 4?
23 How do the wedded couples react to the play?
24 What do Oberon and Titania do at the end of the play?
25 Who apologises for any offence and bids the audience good night?

Freeze-frames

The recommended time allocation for this task (preparation and performance) is approximately 50–60 minutes in total.

Present the play in five freeze-frames (one for each act) in groups of five to seven students.

Instructions

- Read carefully through the summary for each act.
- Work out how you will present the action of each act in a single 'frozen' pose.
- You may choose to represent a character, an event or even an idea. You may strike a pose where you are doing two things at once.
- Your teacher will tell you to present Act 1 and then instruct you to CHANGE and then FREEZE for your representation of Act 2. This will continue until you have represented all five acts.
- You shouldn't take longer than 15 seconds between acts, so make sure you practise your changeovers before you present your freeze-frames to the class.
- Make sure you can explain what you represent, who you are or what you are doing when you present your freeze-frames to the class.

Act 1

Act 1 Scene 1 (Part 1)

CHARACTERS

Theseus
Egeus
Hermia
Lysander
Hippolyta
Demetrius
Philostrate *(non-speaking)*

N A NUTSHELL

The play opens with Theseus and Hippolyta discussing their wedding, which will take place in four days' time. Egeus enters with his daughter, Hermia, and two suitors for her hand in marriage, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus complains that his daughter is refusing to marry Demetrius, and wants instead to marry Lysander. Appealing to Athenian law, Egeus insists that Hermia be put to death if she disobeys him. Hermia and Lysander plead their case but the Duke is unmoved, telling Hermia that if she doesn't marry Demetrius she will be forced to choose between being executed and living as a nun.

Before you read

- Egeus accuses Lysander of 'bewitching' his daughter or winning her love by various underhanded methods. These include gifts of various toys and trinkets: 'gauds', 'conceits', 'knacks' and 'trifles'. 'Nosegays' are small bouquets of flowers and 'sweetmeats' are confectionery.
- Hippolyta does not say a great deal in this scene but Theseus speaks of winning her love by doing her 'injuries'. It seems she is a captive of war. Is she forced into this marriage? Your interpretation of this is likely to affect how you read her lines.
- In Theseus' opening speech he complains that the time before the couple's wedding (their 'nuptial hour') is passing too slowly. The current moon is obviously in its final stages but Theseus states that it 'wanes' or disappears too slowly, and he eagerly awaits the new moon, when his desires will be fulfilled. Hippolyta assures him that the time will pass quickly (the new moon will arrive soon enough).

Pert: Lively
Melancholy: Sadness
Vexation: Troubles
Feigning: False, deceptive; a 'feigning voice' is a voice singing softly
Aye: Always, eternity
Entreat: Ask or plead; beseech
Abjure: Give up
Dote: Like or love excessively

Fit your fancies to your father's will …

Marriage conventions and laws

'A Fete at Bermondsey' by Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder, painted in about 1569 and often thought to depict a marriage celebration

Women had few rights in Shakespeare's time and even fewer in ancient Athens. To marry, a girl needed her father's consent, and marriage was seen, in a legal sense, as a transfer of property. This is the origin of the wedding tradition of the father giving away the bride at the altar. The father was officially giving away, or transferring, his property to another man.

In the opening scene, we discover that Egeus has arranged for his daughter to marry Demetrius. Arranged marriages still take place in many countries today. They were

common in ancient Athens and were still fairly common in Shakespeare's day, mainly among the rich, who were looking to protect their wealth and property. Sometimes a marriage was arranged shortly after a child's birth. While poorer people had more freedom to choose whom they married, they still had to seek their parents' permission, regardless of whether they were male or female. The idea of marrying for love, as Hermia and Lysander want to do, was becoming more popular by Shakespeare's time.

The law Egeus invokes in this scene states that daughters who disobey their father's choice in marriage shall be put to death. This law really existed in ancient Athens but was rarely enacted. There was no such law in Elizabethan England, but daughters who disobeyed their fathers could still be disowned, a frightening prospect in the days before social welfare.

Athens. The palace of Theseus.

[THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, PHILOSTRATE and Attendants enter]

THESEUS Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace: four happy days bring in
Another moon; but, O, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a step-dame or a dowager,
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

HIPPOLYTA Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

THESEUS Go, Philostrate,
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments;
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;
Turn melancholy forth to funerals:
The pale companion is not for our pomp.

[PHILOSTRATE exits]

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword,
And won thy love, doing thee injuries;

1–6 **Now, fair Hippolyta … a young man's revenue:** See the third dot point in **Before you read**.

11 **Solemnities:** Ceremonies or celebrations.

12–15 **Stir up the Athenian … not for our pomp:** Theseus commands his servant Philostrate to prepare the youth of Athens for a party. He wants them to be 'pert' (or lively), rather than 'melancholy' (sad), as this is more in keeping with a wedding.

But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.

[EGEUS, HERMIA, LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS enter]

EGEUS Happy be Theseus, our renownèd Duke.
THESEUS Thanks, good Egeus; what's the news with thee?
EGEUS Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia –
Stand forth, Demetrius – My noble lord,
This man hath my consent to marry her. –
Stand forth, Lysander – And my gracious Duke,
This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child –
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,
And interchanged love-tokens with my child.
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung,
With feigning voice verses of feigning love,
And stolen the impression of her fantasy
With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits,
Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats (messengers
Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth).
With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart,
Turned her obedience, which is due to me,
To stubborn harshness – And, my gracious Duke,
Be it so she will not here before your grace
Consent to marry with Demetrius,
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens:
As she is mine, I may dispose of her,
Which shall be either to this gentleman,
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.
THESEUS What say you, Hermia? Be advised, fair maid:
To you your father should be as a god,
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted, and within his power,
To leave the figure or disfigure it.
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

18–19 **But I will wed … with revelling:** The wedding will have a merrier tone than the circumstances of Hippolyta's capture (see **Before you read**).

34–35 **Messengers / Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth:** These things would have a significant influence on a girl who is inexperienced in love.

47–51 **To you your father … figure or disfigure it:** In ancient Athens and Elizabethan England, fathers expected absolute obedience (see box entitled 'Marriage conventions and laws' before this scene). Theseus is stating that, since Hermia's father created her and endowed her with beauty, he has the right to shape her destiny or dispose of her.

HERMIA So is Lysander.
THESEUS In himself he is;
But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
The other must be held the worthier.
HERMIA I would my father looked but with my eyes.
THESEUS Rather your eyes must with his judgement look.
HERMIA I do entreat your grace to pardon me.
I know not by what power I am made bold,
Nor how it may concern my modesty
In such a presence here to plead my thoughts;
But I beseech your grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case,
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.
THESEUS Either to die the death or to abjure
Forever the society of men.
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun:
For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.
Thrice-blessèd they that master so their blood,
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;
But earthlier happy is the rose distilled,
Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn,
Grows, lives and dies in single blessedness.
HERMIA So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
Ere I will yield my virgin patent up
Unto his lordship, whose unwishèd yoke
My soul consents not to give sovereignty.
THESEUS Take time to pause; and, by the next new moon
(The sealing-day betwixt my love and me,

58–61 **I do entreat … plead my thoughts:** Hermia is being very bold speaking in the presence of the Duke, especially as she is a woman. She is concerned that her behaviour may be seen as disrespectful or inappropriate.

68–71 **Know of your youth … in shady cloister mewed:** Theseus is pointing out that Hermia is young and therefore may find the life of a nun difficult to endure ('livery' = clothing; 'cloister' = a convent, where nuns live; 'mewed' = confined).

74–78 **Thrice-blessèd … dies in single blessedness:** Nuns are extraordinarily blessed (that is, blessed three times over) in remaining virgins, but that doesn't necessarily mean happiness on earth. Theseus compares their state of remaining single, or celibate, to that of fruit or a flower withering on a branch.

80–82 **Ere I will yield … not to give sovereignty:** Hermia is saying that she will not give up her virginity to a husband like Demetrius, by whom she won't agree to be ruled.

For everlasting bond of fellowship),
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,
Or on Diana's altar to protest
For aye austerity and single life.

DEMETRIUS Relent, sweet Hermia – and, Lysander, yield
Thy crazèd title to my certain right.

LYSANDER You have her father's love, Demetrius;
Let me have Hermia's. Do you marry him?

EGEUS Scornful Lysander! True, he hath my love;
And what is mine my love shall render him.
And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate unto Demetrius.

LYSANDER I am, my lord, as well derived as he,
As well possessed: my love is more than his;
My fortunes every way as fairly ranked,
If not with vantage, as Demetrius';
And, which is more than all these boasts can be,
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.
Why should not I then prosecute my right?
Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head,
Made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena,
And won her soul; and she, sweet lady, dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,
Upon this spotted and inconstant man.

THESEUS I must confess that I have heard so much,
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof;
But, being over-full of self-affairs,
My mind did lose it. But, Demetrius, come;
And come, Egeus; you shall go with me:
I have some private schooling for you both.
For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will;
Or else the law of Athens yields you up
(Which by no means we may extenuate)

89–90 **Or on Diana's altar … single life:** Or vow to live unmarried (as a nun). Diana was the goddess of chastity or sexual purity.

101–02 **My fortunes … as Demetrius':** I am just as wealthy as Demetrius, if not wealthier.

106–07 **I'll avouch it … Nedar's daughter:** I'll swear to his face that he made love to or is courting Helena. 'Made love to' does not necessarily mean 'had sex with', as we learn through Demetrius' insistence later in the play that he has not slept with Helena.

109–10 **Devoutly dotes … and inconstant man:** Lysander claims Helena loves Demetrius to the point of worship, and calls him 'spotted' (stained or immoral) and 'inconstant' (unfaithful or fickle).

120 **Extenuate:** Water down or moderate.

To death, or to a vow of single life.
Come, my Hippolyta; what cheer, my love?
Demetrius and Egeus, go along:
I must employ you in some business
Against our nuptial and confer with you
Of something nearly that concerns yourselves.

EGEUS With duty and desire we follow you.

[All but LYSANDER and HERMIA exit]

125 **Nuptial:** Wedding.

QUESTIONS

1 What event is Theseus impatiently waiting for at the beginning of this scene?
2 What is Egeus' complaint against his daughter, Hermia?
3 Egeus says to Lysander, 'With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart' (line 36). Without looking up the word 'filched' in the dictionary, what do you think he means by this?
4 Draw up and complete a table like the one below, explaining how the language of Egeus shows his attitude toward Lysander.

Language feature	Examples from the text	Egeus' attitude toward Lysander
Repetition of words	• 'thou'	
Harsh-sounding, accusatory words	• 'cunning' • 'filched'	

5 List the words Hermia uses when she addresses the Duke (Theseus) that suggest she is being polite and respectful.
6 Lysander asserts that he has a greater claim to marry Hermia than Demetrius has. What reasons does he give?
7 With what three options is Hermia presented?
8 How would you describe the character of Theseus based on your reading of this scene?

EXTEND

1 What words does Demetrius use to make his marriage proposal sound superior to Lysander's?
2 An *anachronism* is something that does not fit the time or is historically out of place. This play is set in the city of Athens in ancient Greece, in a time before Christianity. Bearing this in mind, can you find an anachronism in this scene?

DISCUSS

1 How does the view held by Egeus and Theseus on the role of daughters (and women in general) compare with modern-day views in Australia?

2 In stage productions, some directors emphasise how *similar* Lysander and Demetrius are. They use theatrical devices such as costume, lighting and the way the characters speak to highlight these similarities. If you were to direct a production of this scene, explain how you would use these theatrical devices to emphasise the *differences* between Lysander and Demetrius. These devices could be used to emphasise the conflict between Lysander and Demetrius in this scene.

Introducing metaphors and similes

If you have ever called someone hot, a pig, a gun, a dog or even a legend, then you have used a **metaphor**. A metaphor is not literally true but it makes a powerful comparison that is true in a deeper sense. If, for example, you call your brother a *pig*, you know that he is not literally a pig, but you might be communicating something about his manners or perhaps how much he eats. If you describe a shot on the soccer pitch as a *rocket*, you know it's not literally a rocket, but you are saying something about the shot's speed and power. Again, you might describe someone attractive as *hot*. Clearly, you are not discussing their temperature!

Similes work in much the same way, but where a metaphor is a direct statement of equivalence (my brother *is* a pig), similes make clear that one thing is being compared to another (my brother is *like* a pig). In his opening speech, Theseus, who is impatient to be married, compares his desire for the days to pass quickly to a young man's desire for an old, rich stepmother or widow (a dowager) to die, so he can claim her fortune as his inheritance. Shortly after this, Hippolyta compares the crescent of the new moon to a bow in the line, 'And then the moon, like to a silver bow'. Here the comparison of the shape of the moon to a bow (as in a bow and arrow) is made clear through the word 'like', making this a simile.

At the beginning of Part 2 of this scene, Lysander asks, 'Why is your cheek so pale? / How chance the roses there do fade so fast?' This is a metaphor because the statement is not true in a literal sense; Hermia does not literally have roses in her cheeks, but Lysander is commenting on how they are usually rosy or red in colour. Look out for more metaphors and similes in this next scene and those that follow.

Act 1 Scene 1 (Part 2)

CHARACTERS

Hermia
Helena
Lysander

IN A NUTSHELL

Lysander attempts to comfort Hermia by telling her of other lovers' difficulties. He then informs her of a plan for the two of them to stay with his aunt, beyond the reach of the Athenian law, and Hermia agrees to run away with him the following night. Helena enters and complains about Demetrius loving Hermia instead of her. To comfort Helena, Hermia tells her of her planned escape with Lysander. When alone, Helena resolves to tell Demetrius of the lovers' plan, hoping he will be grateful for the favour.

Before you read

- Lysander and Hermia's conversation contains a number of references or allusions to classical mythology. Cupid is the Roman god of love and anyone struck by one of his gold-tipped arrows was said to fall in love. The chariot of Venus, the Roman goddess of love, was said to be drawn by silver doves. The Queen of Carthage, Dido, fell for the Trojan, Aeneas. When he set sail and left her, she committed suicide.
- Remember that dashes (–) indicate an interruption in the flow of conversation. Dashes sometimes show that the speaker is changing from addressing one character to another character, e.g. Lysander says 'I will' to Hermia and 'adieu' (goodbye) to Helena in the same line. Most of the dashes in this scene, however, show Hermia interrupting Lysander.

V

Ere: Before
A league: Roughly 4 km (7 leagues is about 28 km)
Visage: Face
Err: Go astray, do wrong
Waggish: Mischievous, playful

Athens. The palace of Theseus.

LYSANDER How now, my love? Why is your cheek so pale?
How chance the roses there do fade so fast?
HERMIA Belike for want of rain, which I could well
Beteem them from the tempest of my eyes.
LYSANDER Ay me! For aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;
But, either it was different in blood –
HERMIA O cross! Too high to be enthralled to low.
LYSANDER Or else misgraffèd in respect of years –
HERMIA O spite! Too old to be engaged to young.
LYSANDER Or else it stood upon the choice of friends –
HERMIA O hell! To choose love by another's eyes.
LYSANDER Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth;
And ere a man hath power to say 'Behold!'
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:
So quick bright things come to confusion.
HERMIA If then true lovers have been ever crossed,
It stands as an edict in destiny.
Then let us teach our trial patience,
Because it is a customary cross,
As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,
Wishes and tears, poor fancy's followers.

130–31 **Belike for want … tempest of my eyes:** Lysander, commenting on Hermia's pale cheeks, asks, 'How chance the roses there do fade so fast?' and Hermia responds that it is probably through lack of rain, which she could supply by storms of tears. Hermia is extending Lysander's metaphor (turning it into what is known as a *conceit*), as all plants, including roses, need water to survive.

135 **Different in blood:** Different in class or parentage.

136 **O cross! Too high to be enthralled to low:** What a cross (burden) to bear! To be of too high a class to be with someone of a lower class.

137 **Misgraffèd in respect of years:** Incompatible in terms of age.

141–49 **Or, if there were a sympathy … come to confusion:** Lysander discusses the brief or transitory nature of love, using similes to outline his argument ('collied' = blackened, relating to coal; 'spleen' = fit of anger).

150–51 **If then true lovers … edict in destiny:** If the path of true lovers has always been difficult, it must be a rule of life.

153 **A customary cross:** A common burden.

155 **Poor fancy's followers:** The things that follow on from love.

LYSANDER A good persuasion: therefore, hear me, Hermia.
I have a widow aunt, a dowager
Of great revenue, and she hath no child.
From Athens is her house remote seven leagues,
And she respects me as her only son.
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;
And to that place the sharp Athenian law
Cannot pursue us. If thou lov'st me, then
Steal forth thy father's house tomorrow night;
And in the wood, a league without the town,
Where I did meet thee once with Helena,
To do observance to a morn of May,
There will I stay for thee.

HERMIA My good Lysander!
I swear to thee, by Cupid's strongest bow,
By his best arrow with the golden head,
By the simplicity of Venus' doves,
By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,
And by that fire which burned the Carthage queen
(When the false Trojan under sail was seen),
By all the vows that ever men have broke
(In number more than ever women spoke);
In that same place thou hast appointed me,
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

LYSANDER Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.

[HELENA enters]

HERMIA God speed, fair Helena! Whither away?

HELENA Call you me fair? That fair again unsay.
Demetrius loves your fair. O happy fair!
Your eyes are lode-stars; and your tongue's sweet air
More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear,
When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.
Sickness is catching: O, were favour so,
Yours would I catch, fair Hermia, ere I go;
My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,
My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.

167 **To do observance to a morn of May:** To perform the May Day rituals. May Day was an ancient fertility festival.

169–74 **I swear to thee … under sail was seen:** See the first dot point in **Before you read**.

183 **Lode-stars:** Stars by which sailors could navigate.

Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.
O, teach me how you look, and with what art
You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

HERMIA I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA O that my prayers could such affection move!

HERMIA The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA The more I love, the more he hateth me.

HERMIA His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

HELENA None but your beauty; would that fault were mine!

HERMIA Take comfort: he no more shall see my face;
Lysander and myself will fly this place.
Before the time I did Lysander see,
Seemed Athens as a paradise to me.
O then, what graces in my love do dwell,
That he hath turned a heaven unto a hell!

LYSANDER Helen, to you our minds we will unfold:
Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold
Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass
(A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal),
Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.

HERMIA And in the wood, where often you and I
Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie,
Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,
There my Lysander and myself shall meet;
And thence from Athens turn away our eyes,
To seek new friends and stranger companies.
Farewell, sweet playfellow. Pray thou for us;
And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius –
Keep word, Lysander: we must starve our sight
From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight.

[HERMIA exits]

LYSANDER I will, my Hermia – Helena, adieu.
As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!

[LYSANDER exits]

190–91 **Were the world mine … to you translated:** If I had everything in the world except Demetrius, I would give all of it up to look like you (and therefore win Demetrius' love).

209–11 **When Phoebe doth … bladed grass:** The goddess Phoebe (or Diana) is associated with the moon. Here, Lysander talks about the time of night when the moon sees the reflection of her face ('visage') in the water and coats (or 'decks') everything with dew.

HELENA How happy some o'er other some can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so.
He will not know what all but he do know.
And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind;
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgment taste.
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste;
And therefore is Love said to be a child,
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,
So the boy Love is perjured everywhere;
For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine;
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.
Then to the wood will he tomorrow night
Pursue her; and for this intelligence
If I have thanks, it is a dear expense;
But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
To have his sight thither and back again.

[HELENA exits]

232–33 **Things base … form and dignity:** Things ugly or ordinary can be transformed by love and given 'form' (grace or elegance) and dignity.

236–41 **Nor hath Love's mind … is perjured everywhere:** Love lacks sound judgement. Here, the 'wings' and blindness ('no eyes') suggest quick and rash decisions. Love is a child in this way and it is no wonder that he is so often fooled. Love deceives and is deceived in the same way that mischievous boys playing games do not keep their word.

250–51 **But herein mean I … thither and back again:** But at least my pain will be worthwhile if Demetrius can look on me with love as he once did. Helena's speech and the play in general regularly connect sight with being in love.

QUESTIONS

1 What does Lysander mean when he says, 'The course of true love never did run smooth'?

2 Summarise Lysander and Hermia's plan.

3 Construct and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of the way Shakespeare presents many contrasts between Hermia and Helena in this scene. What do you think is Shakespeare's purpose in presenting so many contrasts between Hermia and Helena?

Hermia	Helena
Frown	
Curses	
	Love
Hell	Heaven

4 Helena uses a number of similes and metaphors to describe Hermia's beauty. List two of them.

5 Why does Helena decide to tell Demetrius of the lovers' planned escape?

6 How would you describe Helena's personality from the evidence in this scene?

1 Most of Helena's lines are delivered in rhyme. Do you think this would make the audience more or less sympathetic to her plight? Does rhyme make her love-sick grief more or less convincing? Explain.

2 In lines 141–49, Lysander uses a number of similes to describe love.
   - **a** Make a list of at least three of Lysander's similes.
   - **b** What is Lysander's main point in describing love this way? What characteristic of love or the experience of love is Shakespeare highlighting?

3 How does Lysander turn the heaven of Athens into a hell (line 207), according to Hermia?

4 Shakespeare uses abundant repetition of words such as 'see', 'eyes', 'sight' and 'blind'. How might these words relate to the focus on love in this scene?

5 The world of Theseus' court (his place of rule) is very different from the world of the four young lovers. One way that Shakespeare shows these differences is in the language of these two worlds. Find some examples of the following uses of language in Act 1 Scene 1 (Parts 1 and 2):

Courtly language *Act 1 Scene 1 (Part 1)*		**Young lovers' language** *Act 1 Scene 1 (Part 2)*	
Language device	**Example**	**Language device**	**Example**
Blank verse		Rhyme	
Formal		Rhyming couplets	

Authoritative tone		Stichomythia*	
Detailed description		Simple imagery	
Male-dominated dialogue		Others?	

* **Stichomythia** refers to dialogue written as single lines spoken by alternating characters.

DISCUSS

1 Do you think Helena's idea of telling Demetrius about the lovers' plan is wise? Give two reasons for and two against Helena's idea.

2 In your notebook, copy and complete the following diagram. Add lines or arrows connecting various lovers (who loves whom) at this point in the play.

Theseus	**Hippolyta**
Demetrius	**Hermia**
Lysander	**Helena**

Note: When Puck begins his mischief you will need to redraw this diagram a few times, perhaps using different colours to show that the objects of some characters' love have changed.

Michael Hoffman: DVD Chapter 2 (At Theseus' court)

PRESS PLAY

1 How does Hoffman present Theseus and Hippolyta's relationship at the start of the scene? Do you find it consistent with Shakespeare's portrayal of this relationship?

2 How do props, music, lighting and camera work contribute to a romantic atmosphere at the beginning of this scene?

3 How does Hoffman add to Shakespeare's stage directions to emphasise the tension between Lysander and Demetrius?

4 What seems to be Hippolyta's attitude to Hermia's plight? How does Hoffman convey this attitude?

5 Copy and complete the table below to show how Hoffman uses costume to convey ideas.

Idea	Use of costume
The formality (or strictness) of Theseus' court	
The conservative or restrictive nature of Athenian society	
The similarity of the suitors, Demetrius and Lysander	

A word about soliloquy

You are probably familiar with television soap operas, with their predictable plots and abundance of plastic surgery. You might have noticed that the characters on these sorts of shows sometimes speak their thoughts aloud when nobody else is around. Actually, this is not as strange as it sounds – Shakespeare had his characters doing this hundreds of years ago and it is known as **soliloquy** (*so-li-lo-kwee*).

A soliloquy involves a character talking either when he or she is alone or when it is understood that the other characters cannot hear what is being said. Shakespeare uses this device to help the audience understand the mind of the character who is speaking and their motives or plans. We talk to ourselves all the time (try thinking without language) and soliloquies reflect this.

The device was used by some playwrights before Shakespeare, but he is generally considered the first writer to genuinely capture the inner workings of the human mind, especially in his later plays like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contains only a few soliloquies and they are generally not as complicated as those in the later plays. In the previous scene, when left alone, Helena speaks of her love for Demetrius and thinks aloud of a plan to win his love.

Act 1 Scene 2

CHARACTERS

Bottom
Quince
Flute
Snug
Starveling
Snout

IN A NUTSHELL

A group of amateur actors meets to discuss the play they are hoping to perform before the Duke at his wedding. Quince assigns them their parts but is continually interrupted by one of the cast, Bottom, who seems determined to act every part. Everyone agrees to meet in the woods to rehearse the following evening.

Before you read

- Bottom is what is known as a comic character. He is loud and melodramatic, and loves getting people's attention any way he can.

- All of these amateur actors are also tradesmen, called 'mechanicals' in Elizabethan England. Nick Bottom is a weaver (a person who makes fabrics for clothes), Francis Flute is a bellows-mender (bellows are a machine for pumping air or steam), Robin Starveling is a tailor (he makes clothes), Tom Snout is a tinker (a mender of pots and pans), and Snug is a joiner (a craftsman who makes furniture).

V

Interlude: Short play
Lamentable: Sad, mournful
Gallant: Fine, splendid
Lofty: Exalted or superior
Tyrant: An unjust or cruel leader
Condole: Express great sorrow

Athens. Quince's house.

[QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE, SNOUT and STARVELING enter]

QUINCE Is all our company here?

BOTTOM You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the script.

QUINCE Here is the scroll of every man's name, which is thought fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude before the Duke, and the Duchess, on his wedding day at night.

BOTTOM First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on, then read the names of the actors, and so grow to a point

QUINCE Marry, our play is *The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe.*

BOTTOM A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll. Masters, spread yourselves.

QUINCE Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver.

BOTTOM Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.

QUINCE You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM What is Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?

QUINCE A lover that kills himself most gallant for love.

BOTTOM That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes: I will move storms, I will condole in some measure. To the rest, yet my chief humour is for a tyrant. I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split –

19 **Condole:** Express grief.

21 **Ercles:** Hercules, a hero of great strength, and a son of Zeus, in ancient Greek mythology.

The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates;
And Phibbus' car
Shall shine from far
And make and mar
The foolish Fates –

This was lofty! – Now name the rest of the players – This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein; a lover is more condoling.

QUINCE Francis Flute, the bellows-mender.

FLUTE Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.

FLUTE What is Thisbe? A wandering knight?

QUINCE It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE Nay, faith, let not me play a woman; I have a beard coming.

QUINCE That's all one: you shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.

BOTTOM If I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too; I'll speak in a monstrous little voice – 'Thisbe, Thisbe.' 'Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! Thy Thisbe dear, and lady dear!'

QUINCE No, no; you must play Pyramus; and, Flute, you Thisbe.

BOTTOM Well, proceed.

QUINCE Robin Starveling, the tailor.

STARVELING Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe's mother. Tom Snout, the tinker.

SNOUT Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE You, Pyramus' father; myself, Thisbe's father; Snug, the joiner: you, the lion's part. And, I hope, here is a play fitted.

SNUG Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

QUINCE You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.

BOTTOM Let me play the lion too. I will roar, that I will do any man's heart good to hear me; I will roar, that I will make the Duke say, 'Let him roar again! Let him roar again!'

QUINCE If you should do it too terribly, you would fright the Duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek; and that were enough to hang us all.

ALL That would hang us, every mother's son.

BOTTOM I grant you, friends, if that you should fright the ladies out of their wits they would have no more discretion but to hang us.

26 **Phibbus' car:** The chariot of the sun god, Phoebus Apollo.

29 **Fates:** The goddesses who control destiny.

50 **Fitted:** Fitting or suiting this cast.

53 **Extempore:** By improvising (pronounced *ex-tem-poor-ray*).

But I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar as 'twere any nightingale.

QUINCE You can play no part but Pyramus; for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man, a proper man, as one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely gentleman-like man. Therefore, you must needs play Pyramus.

BOTTOM Well, I will undertake it. What beard were I best to play it in?

QUINCE Why, what you will.

BOTTOM I will discharge it in either your straw-colour beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-colour beard, your perfect yellow.

QUINCE Some of your French crowns have no hair at all, and then you will play bare-faced – But, masters, here are your parts, and I am to entreat you, request you and desire you, to con them by tomorrow night; and meet me in the palace wood, a mile without the town, by moonlight: there will we rehearse; for if we meet in the city, we shall be dogged with company, and our devices known. In the meantime I will draw a bill of properties, such as our play wants. I pray you, fail me not.

BOTTOM We will meet; and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains; be perfect; adieu.

QUINCE At the Duke's oak we meet.

BOTTOM Enough; hold or cut bow-strings.

[All exit]

72–73 **Some of your French crowns have no hair at all, and then you will play bare-faced:** This could be paraphrased as: 'Some Frenchmen have lost all their hair, so you might end up acting without a beard.' This may be an obscure dirty joke, relating to the sexually transmitted disease of syphilis, which caused balding and was often referred to as 'the French disease'.

74 **Con them:** Learn them by heart.

78 **A bill of properties:** A list of props to be used in the play.

82 **Hold or cut bowstrings:** The exact meaning of this phrase is unclear. It could relate to a retreating army abandoning their bows and cutting the strings so the enemy was unable to use them.

QUESTIONS

1 List the parts in the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* that Bottom is keen to play.

2 What simile does Bottom use to explain how he will roar?

3 Draw up and complete the following table in your notes to show your understanding of which tradesman-actor ('mechanical') is to play which part in their production of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Where you are unsure, write 'unsure'.

Mechanical	Part in *Pyramus and Thisbe*
Nick Bottom	
Francis Flute	

Robin Starveling	
Tom Snout	
Snug	
Peter Quince	

4 Why does Quince suggest the actors meet in the woods the following night?

5 Create and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of the way that Shakespeare presents Bottom and his acting colleagues as comic figures.

Aspect of the text	Examples	Write a short paragraph summarising Shakespeare's characterisation of the mechanicals as comic figures
Awful or ridiculous rhyme		
Oxymorons *(explanation on page 41)*		
Overacting		
Bottom's desire to play all the parts		
Comical names		

EXTEND

1 The writer GK Chesterton wrote that Bottom's literary taste 'is concerned with sound rather than sense'. Can you find an example of something he says from this scene that sounds good but does not actually make any sense?

2 Shakespeare could create a character using very few words. Snug the joiner says that he is 'slow of study' or not very bright. How does the language Shakespeare uses convey this?

3 Make a brief list of differences in the language features of these tradesmen/actors (the mechanicals) and the young lovers. Use your answer to Question 5 (above) and those in the previous scenes as a starting point.

4 Of what might the audience be reminded from the previous scene when Peter Quince mentions rehearsing in the woods? Might this lead the audience to expect conflict, or comedy, or perhaps something else?

DISCUSS

1 Shakespeare has already introduced us to two 'worlds' within the play (complete with their own language) – the worlds of Theseus' court and the world of the four young lovers. In this scene, we are introduced to a third world: that of the mechanicals, with their own distinct language features.

If you were given the role of director of this scene, how would you present the mechanicals to the audience? In small groups, discuss such theatrical devices as costume, blocking (positioning and movement), props, and even lighting and sound. Then share your group's directing decisions with the rest of the class.

Michael Hoffman: DVD Chapter 4 (Meet the mechanicals)

1. How would you describe the music introducing this scene? What emotions does it evoke?
2. What animal passes Bottom when he first appears on screen? What event is this foreshadowing (think back to the summary of Act 3 on page 18)?
3. How does the costume of the mechanicals (tradesmen/actors) contrast with the clothes worn at Theseus' court? What does Hoffman convey through their costume?
4. How does Bottom's costume contrast with the rest of the mechanicals? What elements of Bottom's character is Hoffman emphasising in his choice of costume?
5. Hoffman gives Bottom a back story: he has a wife and a home, which Shakespeare doesn't portray. Do you think this adds anything to your understanding of his character?
6. Hoffman attaches a sense of *pathos* (or sadness) to Bottom's situation. What details contribute to the audience's sympathetic feelings towards Bottom?
7. This scene ends with Bottom getting changed at home. How does the set contribute to a sense of his being restricted or closed-in? Why do you think Hoffman chooses to include this detail?

Introducing oxymorons

An **oxymoron** is created when a writer places contradictory words next to each other to achieve a powerful effect. Examples include bitter-sweet and clever idiot. In the opening scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo delivers a speech that is full of oxymorons, such as 'cold fire', 'loving hate' and 'heavy lightness'. These oxymorons capture Romeo's confused love-sick state. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, oxymorons are used to create comedy rather than confusion. In Act 1 Scene 2, for example, Peter Quince describes their play as a 'lamentable comedy' (lamentable means sad), and Bottom says that he would act as Thisbe (a woman's part) with a 'monstrous little voice'. Watch for more oxymorons as the play continues.

Act 2

Act 2 Scene 1 (Part 1)

CHARACTERS

Titania
(the Fairy Queen)
Puck *(also called Robin Goodfellow)*
Oberon
(the Fairy King)
Fairy

IN A NUTSHELL

A fairy (who serves Titania) and Puck (who serves Oberon) bump into each other in the woods. Puck reports that Oberon is angry with Titania because of her refusal to give up a stolen child to him, and then admits to being the mischief-making sprite called Robin Goodfellow. Titania and Oberon enter and argue about the child. She lists all the natural disasters and unfortunate events that have occurred as a result of their quarrel, and insists that she will be keeping the child because the child's mother was a close friend of hers. After Titania leaves, Oberon commands Puck to fetch him a certain flower, the juice of which he plans to pour on Titania's eyelids as she sleeps. This will cause her to fall in love with the next creature that she sees.

Before you read

- Although there is some challenging language in this scene, it is not important that you understand every word. The first speech the Fairy makes simply states that she is wandering about doing all the usual things that fairies are supposed to do.
- Titania's long speech is mainly a list of natural disasters, including storms, floods, famines and diseases. The important thing to understand is that all of these things are a result of Titania and Oberon's argument.

Thorough: An archaic (or old) word for 'through'
Revels: Festivities or celebrations
Perforce: By force; violently
Forsworn: Rejected or renounced
Changeling: A child taken by the fairies
Forsooth: In truth; indeed
Votaress: A woman who has taken a vow (for example, a vow of chastity)
Perchance: Perhaps; maybe

Fairies, skip hence …

Elizabethan views on fairies and elves

When writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare drew on beliefs about fairies current at that time. Elizabethan fairies loved music and dancing and were generally believed to be especially active at night. Shakespeare's portrayal of Puck (or Robin Goodfellow) seems consistent with Elizabethan beliefs. He was a familiar figure in popular folklore, famous for causing mischief and said to be the guardian of home and hearth. Some housewives would leave bread and cream out for him in the hope he would clean their houses.

In many ways, though, Shakespeare's depiction of fairies contradicts commonly held beliefs of his time. Rather than being human in size, Shakespeare's fairies are tiny: they fight with bumblebees and hide in acorn cups. Elizabethan fairies were far more sinister than Shakespeare's, bringing disease and killing livestock. It was also thought they sometimes abducted children, whom they replaced with deformed or intellectually disabled fairy-children, called changelings. While Titania and Oberon's argument hints at some of these things, they and their followers seem relatively harmless in comparison to what was generally thought about fairies at the time.

For better or for worse, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has changed the way that fairies have been portrayed in literature ever since.

A wood near Athens.

[From opposite sides, a FAIRY and PUCK enter]

PUCK How now, spirit! Whither wander you?
FAIRY Over hill, over dale,

1 **Whither wander you?** Where do you wander?

Thorough bush, thorough brier,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire,
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon's sphere;
And I serve the Fairy Queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green.
The cowslips tall her pensioners be;
In their gold coats spots you see:
Those be rubies, fairy favours,
In those freckles live their savours.
I must go seek some dewdrops here,
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
Farewell, thou lob of spirits; I'll be gone:
Our Queen and all our elves come here anon.

PUCK
The King doth keep his revels here tonight:
Take heed the Queen come not within his sight;
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,
Because that she as her attendant hath
A lovely boy, stol'n from an Indian king;
She never had so sweet a changèling;
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild.
But she perforce withholds the lovèd boy,
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.
And now they never meet in grove or green,
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,
But they do square that all their elves for fear
Creep into acorn cups and hide them there.

FAIRY
Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow. Are not you he

3 **Brier:** A wild rosebush with thorny stems.

4 **Pale:** A fence or land enclosed by a fence.

7 **Swifter than the moon's sphere:** More quickly than the moon's orbit.

9–13 **To dew her orbs … live their savours:** The Fairy lists various activities that she performs for the Fairy Queen. She talks of marking the village green with circles (or 'orbs') of dew, and mentions that 'cowslips' (small, yellow wildflowers with red spots), which are the Fairy Queen's bodyguards (or 'pensioners'), are spotted with rubies and freckles that give off sweet scents because of the Fairy's work.

16 **Lob of spirits:** Clown of the spirit world.

20 **Passing fell and wrath:** Excessively fierce and angry.

30 **Square:** Quarrel.

33 **Shrewd and knavish sprite:** Cunning and mischievous spirit.

That frights the maidens of the villagery;
Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern,
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;
Mislead night-wand'rers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck.
Are not you he?

PUCK Thou speak'st aright:
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
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 sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
And 'tailor' cries, and falls into a cough;
And then the whole quire hold their hips and laugh,
And waxen in their mirth, and neeze, and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted there.
But room, fairy: here comes Oberon.

FAIRY And here my mistress. Would that he were gone!

[From one side, OBERON enters, with his train; from the other, TITANIA, with hers]

OBERON Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.

TITANIA What, jealous Oberon? – Fairies, skip hence:
I have forsworn his bed and company.

36–37 **Skim milk … housewife churn:** The fairy accuses Puck of skimming the cream off the top of milk and tampering with the butter-press, making the housewife's efforts useless ('bootless').

38 **Make the drink to bear no barm:** Prevent the beer from brewing; 'barm' is the yeasty head on beer.

44–46 **I jest to Oberon … a filly foal:** I amuse Oberon by tricking a fat horse (fed on beans) when I imitate a female horse.

48 **In very likeness of a roasted crab:** In the appearance of a crabapple.

50 **Dewlap:** A loose fold of skin hanging around the neck.

54–57 **And 'tailor' cries … never wasted there:** The woman cries out 'tailor' in surprise, possibly because she lands on her backside – tailors in Elizabethan times worked sitting down on the floor. The whole company ('quire') laugh uncontrollably and sneeze ('waxen' = increase; 'mirth' = merriment and laughter).

OBERON Tarry, rash wanton: am not I thy lord?
TITANIA Then I must be thy lady: but I know
When thou hast stol'n away from fairy land,
And in the shape of Corin sat all day,
Playing on pipes of corn and versing love
To amorous Phillida. Why art thou here,
Come from the farthest Steppe of India?
But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,
Your buskined mistress and your warrior love,
To Theseus must be wedded, and you come
To give their bed joy and prosperity.
OBERON How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,
Glance at my credit with Hippolyta,
Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?
Didst thou not lead him through the glimmering night
From Perigenia, whom he ravishèd?
And make him with fair Aegles break his faith,
With Ariadne and Antiopa?
TITANIA These are the forgeries of jealousy;
And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By pavèd fountain or by rushy brook,
Or in the beachèd margent of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind;
But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have sucked up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which, falling in the land,
Have every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents.

63 **Tarry, rash wanton:** A paraphrase of this might read, 'Wait, you hasty, disobedient tart!' Oberon is being very insulting here.

66–68 **And in the shape of Corin … to amorous Phillida:** Corin and Phillida were standard names for a shepherd and a shepherdess; Titania is accusing Oberon of flirting with or courting various women.

71–73 **Your buskined mistress … joy and prosperity:** Titania is suggesting that Oberon had an affair with Hippolyta in a time past, and that Oberon has returned to bless the couple's wedding. 'Buskins' are high leather boots.

77–80 **Didst thou not … and Antiopa:** Oberon is accusing Titania of being involved with Theseus. Oberon claims Titania led Theseus on after his rape of Perigenia, and that she made him break off his relationships with Aegles, Ariadne and Antiopa (all characters from Greek mythology). Titania's behaviour is in keeping with goddesses from Greek and Roman myth.

85 **Beachèd margent of the sea:** The beach at the edge of the sea.

86 **Ringlets:** Circular dances.

The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard.
The fold stands empty in the drownèd field,
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock.
The nine men's morris is filled up with mud,
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
For lack of tread are undistinguishable.
The human mortals want their winter here;
No night is now with hymn or carol blessed.
Therefore, the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound.
And thorough this distemperature, we see
The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,
The childing autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazèd world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which.
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension:
We are their parents and original.

OBERON Do you amend it then; It lies in you.
Why should Titania cross her Oberon?
I do but beg a little changeling boy,
To be my henchman.

TITANIA Set your heart at rest:
The Fairy land buys not the child of me.
His mother was a votaress of my order;

93–100 **The ox hath … are undistinguishable:** Oberon and Titania's argument has caused chaos in the natural world. The fields are flooded, crops are rotting and cattle are dying, thus becoming food for crows. The ground is too muddy for games or dances, like the 'nine men's Morris', and paths are unrecognisable ('murrion' = infected; 'quaint mazes' = elaborate paths; 'wanton green' = lush grass).

105 **Rheumatic diseases:** Illnesses like cold and flu.

106–11 **And thorough this distemperature … in mockery, set:** The seasons are altering. Heavy frosts fall on roses and winter weather covers summer plants with ice. 'Hiems' is the god of winter, while a 'chaplet' is a wreath.

111–17 **The spring, the summer … parents and original:** The seasons have changed in their appearances and everything is in confusion. These lines could be paraphrased as: 'This all comes from our dispute; we are the parents of this ('childing' = fruitful; 'wonted liveries' = usual clothes or appearances; 'mazèd' = amazed or confused; 'progeny' = children or offspring).'

121 **Henchman:** Page boy.

And, in the spicèd Indian air, by night,
Full often hath she gossiped by my side,
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
Marking th' embarkèd traders on the flood,
When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait
Following (her womb then rich with my young squire),
Would imitate, and sail upon the land,
To fetch me trifles, and return again,
As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,
And for her sake I will not part with him.

OBERON How long within this wood intend you stay?

TITANIA Perchance till after Theseus' wedding-day.
If you will patiently dance in our round,
And see our moonlight revels, go with us;
If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts.

OBERON Give me that boy, and I will go with thee.

TITANIA Not for thy Fairy Kingdom – Fairies, away!
We shall chide downright, if I longer stay.

[TITANIA exits, with her train]

OBERON Well, go thy way; thou shalt not from this grove
Till I torment thee for this injury –
My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememb'rest
Since once I sat upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song,
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
To hear the sea-maid's music?

PUCK I remember.

OBERON That very time I saw (but thou couldst not),
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all armed; a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,

140–42 **If you will … spare your haunts:** If you will dance with us and enjoy our moonlight celebrations, come with us; if not, stay out of my way and I will stay out of yours.

148–54 **Thou rememb'rest … the sea-maid's music:** See the history box on Elizabeth and Leicester (page 52).

158 **A fair vestal thronèd by the west:** A chaste queen ruling over a kingdom in the West. Britain was often referred to as the Western Isle, making this a likely allusion to Elizabeth I. A 'vestal' refers to a woman who has sworn to live without a husband.

And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial votaress passèd on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness.
Fetch me that flower; the herb I showed thee once.
The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make a man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.
Fetch me this herb; and be thou here again
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

PUCK I'll put a girdle round about the earth
In forty minutes.

[PUCK exits]

OBERON Having once this juice,
I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.
The next thing then she waking looks upon
(Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape),
She shall pursue it with the soul of love.
And ere I take this charm from off her sight,
As I can take it with another herb,
I'll make her render up her page to me.
But who comes here? I am invisible,
And I will overhear their conference.

163–64 **And the imperial … fancy-free:** The arrow missed and the woman went on her way, without giving any thought to love.

174 **Leviathan:** A mythical sea creature.

175–76 **I'll put a girdle … forty minutes:** A girdle is a circle. Puck is claiming that he can circle the earth in forty minutes.

185 **I'll make her render up her page to me:** By his scheme, Oberon is hoping to force Titania to give up the child they have been arguing over.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the disagreement between Titania and Oberon?
2. Explain one of Puck's practical jokes.
3. Besides the argument about the changeling boy, of what else do Oberon and Titania accuse each other?
4. What do you think Titania means when she says the rivers have 'overborne their continents' (line 92)? Hint: make sure you read this line in context.
5. Why does Titania refuse to give the child to Oberon?
6. What is Oberon's plan to deal with Titania?
7. Does this plan seem like a practical joke or something more sinister?

EXTEND

1. Why do you think Shakespeare has Puck and the Fairy speaking in rhyme in this scene, and Titania and Oberon speaking in blank verse (unrhymed poetry)? Is this helpful in creating a contrast?
2. Shakespeare employs some striking and beautiful language in this scene. Titania describes the 'brook' (or creek) as 'rushy' (line 84). Think of two possible interpretations for this word.
3. Who does most of the talking in conversation between Oberon and Titania? What does this tell the audience about their relationship and their characters?
4. In your workbook, create and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of how Shakespeare communicates Oberon's anger in this scene.

Feature of Oberon's words and actions	Examples	How this feature communicates Oberon's anger
Insulting names		
Repetition of words		
Impatient phrases		
His cunning plan		
Other?		

DISCUSS

1. Are Titania's arguments for keeping the child reasonable? Is Oberon acting unreasonably?
2. Why did Shakespeare write the line 'I am invisible' for Oberon (line 186)?

3 Imagine that you are the director of a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in your school or community. Think in terms of a very limited budget. In small groups, discuss two or three ways that Oberon might be able to make himself 'invisible' in your production. Consider aspects such as lighting, blocking (positioning and movement), actions, the set and props. Then share your ideas with the rest of the class.

4 In this scene, Shakespeare introduces yet another 'world' within the play – the Fairy Kingdom – complete with distinctive language features. If you were to direct the entire scene, this time with an unlimited budget, how would you create this fairy world? Consider sound, props, the set, costume and lighting. Again, share your group's ideas with the class.

Michael Hoffman: DVD Chapter 5 (Meet the fairies)

1 How is the Fairy Kingdom presented as a world of joy and pleasure? What details (such as props, music, colour, lighting and camera work) contribute to a festive or pleasurable atmosphere?

2 The Fairy Kingdom is a world of magic, presented as one that is parallel to the human world. For this reason, Shakespeare refers to it as a 'shadow' realm, and Puck calls Oberon the 'King of Shadows'. In this scene, how does Hoffman present the Fairy Kingdom as a 'shadow' world?

3 Hoffman dramatically abridges (or edits) Puck's speech. Can you find a line in Shakespeare's text that is omitted, but is illustrated visually?

4 How would you describe the music used to introduce Titania? What atmosphere is Hoffman intending to convey?

5 How is the idea that Oberon and Titania's dispute is causing chaos in the natural world presented in this scene?

6 In what ways does Hoffman present Oberon as a powerful figure?

7 Why does Hoffman use so many close-ups in this scene?

8 How does Hoffman emphasise Titania's anger at the end of her dialogue with Oberon?

Cupid all armed: a certain aim he took …

Elizabeth and Leicester

In 1575 Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, threw a 19-day party in honour of Queen Elizabeth's visit to Kenilworth Castle. It cost him 1000 pounds per day (the equivalent today would be well over a million dollars). The celebrations included plays, Italian acrobats, bear-baiting, a water pageant on the lake and fireworks. Kenilworth is only 17 kilometres from Stratford-upon-Avon so there is a good chance that Shakespeare, who would have been 11 at the time, saw some of the celebrations. Many of Shakespeare's plays show a fascination with royalty: perhaps this was where it all began.

Many scholars think lines 149–64 in this scene are an allusion to Queen Elizabeth's visit to Kenilworth. This would cast Elizabeth as the 'fair vestal thronèd by the west'. In one of the entertainments on the lake, a seven-metre-long mechanical dolphin rose out of the water with a singer on its back, so the singing 'mermaid on the dolphin's back' (line 150) may be a reference to this spectacle. Certainly Leicester pulled out all the stops to woo Elizabeth: Cupid was indeed 'all armed', but Elizabeth did not go on to marry him. Cupid's arrow missed and 'the imperial votaress', Elizabeth, 'passed on … fancy-free'.

Kenilworth Castle, gatehouse landscape

Act 2 Scene 1 (Part 2)

CHARACTERS

Helena
Demetrius
Oberon
Puck

IN A NUTSHELL

Helena and Demetrius enter, quarrelling. Despite Helena's pleading, Demetrius insists that he cannot love her, and through various threats and insults tries to discourage her from following him. Oberon observes all this and, when Puck returns with the flower, asks him to squeeze some drops of the flower's liquid onto the Athenian youth's (Demetrius') eyelids so he might fall in love with Helena when he awakes.

Before you read

- In this scene, Helena suggests that it is unnatural for women to chase after men as she is doing, and that her chasing Demetrius is similar to the way that the roles are reversed in ancient myths. These reversals include: the god Apollo being chased by Daphne; a harmless dove pursuing a griffin (a ferocious mythical beast); and the mild hind (a female deer) chasing a tiger.

V

Adamant: A hard, magnetic substance
Spurn: Reject
Fawn: Try excessively hard to please; grovel
Bootless: Useless
Valour: Courage or bravery

Introducing puns

A **pun** is a play on words. The play may occur because a word has a double meaning ('lie' as in lying down or 'lie' as in not telling the truth), or because two words sound alike, such as 'made' (meaning created) and 'marred' (meaning ruined). Most of Shakespeare's comedies, and some of his tragedies, contain many puns. In the next scene, set in the woods outside Athens, Demetrius complains of being 'wood within this wood'. 'Wood' was another word for mad in Shakespeare's day, so this is a pun. Look for more puns as the play continues.

A wood near Athens.

[DEMETRIUS enters, with HELENA following him; OBERON is still on stage, 'invisible']

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

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

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

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

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

HELENA And I am sick when I look not on you.

DEMETRIUS You do impeach your modesty too much,
To leave the city and commit yourself
Into the hands of one that loves you not;
To trust the opportunity of night
And the ill counsel of a desert place
With the rich worth of your virginity.

195–98 **You draw me … to follow you:** A paraphrase of this might read, 'You attract me, you hard-hearted magnet, but I am not like iron. My heart is true as steel, and if you lost your magnetism, I would not follow you.'

208–10 **What worser place … as you use your dog:** Although being someone's dog suggests a low position, Helena would consider being Demetrius' dog an honour. This shows how much she craves his affection.

214–19 **You do impeach … worth of your virginity:** Demetrius warns Helena that she could be putting her reputation and her virginity in danger by being alone with a man in such a remote place. In ancient Greece and Elizabethan England, a woman's perceived sexual purity (hence, her reputation) was considered of more importance than is generally the case today.

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

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

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

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

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

[DEMETRIUS exits]

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

[HELENA exits]

OBERON Fare thee well, nymph: ere he do leave this grove,
Thou shalt fly him and he shall seek thy love.

[PUCK re-enters]

Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.

PUCK Ay, there it is.

OBERON I pray thee, give it me.
I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,

220–21 **Your virtue is … see your face:** Helena is saying that Demetrius' goodness (his 'virtue') is her protection; she trusts him absolutely. She answers Demetrius' comment about the dangers of night by claiming that it is not night when she sees his face, as it shines so brightly.

227 **Brakes:** Bushes.

245–46 **Fare thee well … seek thy love:** A paraphrase of this might read, 'Good luck, girl. Before you leave this wood you will be the one running away and he will be seeking your love.'

Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight;
And there the snake throws her enamelled skin,
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in.
And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes,
And make her full of hateful fantasies.
Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove:
A sweet Athenian lady is in love
With a disdainful youth. Anoint his eyes;
But do it when the next thing he espies
May be the lady. Thou shalt know the man
By the Athenian garments he hath on.
Effect it with some care, that he may prove
More fond on her than she upon her love;
And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.

PUCK Fear not, my lord: your servant shall do so.

[All exit]

250–52 **Oxlips, woodbine:** Plants; **Musk-roses, eglantine:** Flowers.

QUESTIONS

1 Find and explain two examples where something Demetrius says is reversed, or turned on its head, by Helena.
2 To what animal does Helena compare herself in line 203? What literary device is she using in doing this?
3 Why might it be appropriate that the juice of a love-flower is placed on the sleeper's *eyelids* rather than anywhere else? What point might Shakespeare be making about the nature of romantic attraction?

EXTEND

1 What does Demetrius mean when he says, 'Where is Lysander, and fair Hermia? / The one I'll slay, the other slayeth me' (lines 189–90)?
2 How does Shakespeare create the impression that Demetrius and Helena's conversation has been going on for some time? Why might he have wanted to give this impression?
3 What details does Shakespeare include which might make the audience sympathetic towards Helena? In what ways is sympathy for her aroused?

DISCUSS

Why has Demetrius lost interest in Helena? Use evidence from the text so far.

Introducing imagery: the moon

As well as the themes and ideas that remain consistent throughout *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, another device Shakespeare uses to help us make sense of the multiple plot lines and numerous sets of characters is **imagery**. Images relating to the moon are especially effective in connecting the plots, characters and ideas.

Most civilisations throughout history have attached a special, even religious importance to the moon. In ancient Rome, the goddess Diana (or Luna) was guardian of both women's chastity (sexual purity) and the moon; Diana is referred to many times throughout *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (e.g. Act 1 Scene 1, lines 89 and 209–10; Act 2 Scene 1, line 163; Act 4 Scene 1, lines 68–69; Act 5 Scene 1, line 365). Historically, the moon has also been associated with strange behaviour or madness – note the similarity between the words 'Luna' and 'lunatic'! – and the moon's influence on the earth (e.g. tides) has long been documented. Shakespeare frequently connects lunar imagery in the play with ideas such as love and chastity, odd or irrational behaviour, and natural events such as floods.

Q Make a brief list of songs, poems and even nursery rhymes that mention the moon. How do they relate to chastity, love, strange human behaviour or natural events?

Frequent references to the moon appear in every act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, connecting plots, characters and ideas.

- **Theseus and Hippolyta:** The play opens with Theseus and Hippolyta planning their wedding celebrations and, straight away, Theseus associates the moon with chastity and frustrated desires (Act 1 Scene 1, lines 1–4). Hippolyta describes the moon as Cupid's 'silver bow / New-bent in heaven' (lines 9–10), and then Theseus links the 'new moon' with their 'everlasting bond of fellowship' (lines 83 and 85).
- **The young lovers:** Most of the play follows the comical and sometimes magical journey of Lysander and Hermia, and Demetrius and Helena, into the forest outside Athens. Their entire journey takes place at night, by moonlight (e.g. Act 1 Scene 1, lines 208–13). Through the play, note how Shakespeare connects the lovers' escape into the moonlit forest with love and chastity, especially the irrational nature of love.
- **The mechanicals:** Bottom and his tradesmen/actor friends practise their play in the same forest by moonlight (Act 1 Scene 2, line 75) and, ridiculously, spend most of their time discussing how to present moonlight in their performance.

- **The Fairy Kingdom:** In Oberon and Titania's fairy world, many references to the moon appear. These allusions are always connected with natural events, such as floods (Act 2 Scene 1, line 103) and the moon's movement across the sky (Act 2 Scene 1, line 7; Act 4 Scene 1, line 93). Strange circumstances relating to love and chastity are also linked to the effect of the moon (see Act 2 Scene 1, lines 156 and 162; Act 3 Scene 1, lines 143 and 163).
- **Pyramus and Thisbe:** In Act 5, the mechanicals perform this play to celebrate the triple wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, and the young lovers. Note how the events in this 'play within the play' occur by moonlight. Also note how *Pyramus and Thisbe* focuses on love and chastity. There certainly is some very odd behaviour from the actors (Act 5 Scene 1, lines 134–40, 225–30, 252).

Shakespeare's language and the moon

Besides a host of lunar images connecting aspects of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is important to note that, frequently, when the moon is mentioned, the language of the play is strangely affected. Most significantly, it is the rhythm of the text that is interrupted.

Q Look up the following lines from the play and briefly describe how the rhythm (or beat) of the language is disrupted: Act 1 Scene 1, line 73; Act 2 Scene 1, lines 6–7; Act 2 Scene 1, line 60.

Another interruption that occurs at the mention of the moon is when the audience actually interrupts the mechanicals' performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* (Act 5 Scene 1, lines 225–30).

Q What might Shakespeare's purpose be in interrupting the rhythm of the text when the moon is mentioned?

As you read through the rest of the play, watch for the way that Shakespeare connects his multiple plots, many sets of characters and central ideas: all under 'the chaste beams of the watery moon'.

Act 2 Scene 2

CHARACTERS

Lysander
Helena
Hermia
Puck
Titania
Oberon
1ST Fairy
2ND Fairy
Demetrius

IN A NUTSHELL

Titania's fairies sing her a lullaby, until she falls asleep. Unnoticed by anyone, Oberon pours the juice of the flower onto Titania's eyelids. Hermia and Lysander enter and, because they are lost, agree to rest until morning. As they sleep, Puck enters and mistakenly puts the flower's juice on Lysander's eyes. Helena discovers Lysander on the ground and wakes him, causing him to fall instantly in love with her. When Lysander tells Helena of this love, she is insulted because she is sure Lysander is teasing her. She exits and Lysander pursues her, leaving Hermia to wake frightened and alone.

Before you read

- In her opening speech, Titania commands the fairies to dance in a ring (a roundel). She then directs some of them to go and kill the worms ('cankers') that destroy the musk-rose buds, others to obtain bats' wings, and some others to watch for the owl. These tasks are to be performed 'for the third part of a minute' or 20 seconds.

V

Hence: Away
Troth: Truth
Languish: Fade or become weaker
Virtuous: Full of virtue; morally upright
Wherefore: Why
Heresies: Beliefs that contradict accepted religious beliefs

Another part of the wood.

[TITANIA enters, with her train]

TITANIA Come, now a roundel and a fairy song;
Then, for the third part of a minute, hence:
Some to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds,
Some war with rere-mice for their leathern wings

4 **Rere-mice:** Bats.

To make my small elves coats, and some keep back
The clamorous owl that nightly hoots and wonders
At our quaint spirits. Sing me now asleep;
Then to your offices and let me rest.

[The Fairies sing]

1ST FAIRY *You spotted snakes with double tongue,*
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen;
Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong;
Come not near our Fairy Queen.

2ND FAIRY *Philomel, with melody,*
Sing in our sweet lullaby.
Lulla, lulla, lullaby;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby.
Never harm, nor spell, nor charm
Come our lovely lady nigh.
So, good night, with lullaby.

1ST FAIRY *Weaving spiders, come not here;*
Hence, you long-legged spinners, hence.
Beetles black, approach not near;
Worm nor snail, do no offence.

2ND FAIRY *Philomel, with melody …*

1ST FAIRY Hence, away. Now all is well.
One aloof, stand sentinel.

[All FAIRIES exit. TITANIA is asleep. OBERON enters and squeezes the flower over TITANIA's eyelids]

OBERON What thou seest when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true love take.
Love and languish for his sake,
Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,
Pard, or boar with bristled hair.
In thy eye that shall appear
When thou wak'st, it is thy dear.
Wake when some vile thing is near.

[OBERON exits, then LYSANDER and HERMIA enter]

LYSANDER Fair love, you faint with wand'ring in the wood,
And to speak troth, I have forgot our way.
We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good,
And tarry for the comfort of the day.

HERMIA Be it so, Lysander: find you out a bed,
For I upon this bank will rest my head.

13 **Philomel:** A nightingale from Greek mythology.
26 **One aloof, stand sentinel:** One to stand some distance away as a guard.
30 **Ounce:** Lynx (a medium-size wild cat).

LYSANDER One turf shall serve as pillow for us both:
One heart, one bed, two bosoms and one troth.
HERMIA Nay, good Lysander, for my sake, my dear,
Lie further off yet; do not lie so near.
LYSANDER O, take the sense, sweet, of my innocence!
Love takes the meaning in love's conference.
I mean, that my heart unto yours is knit,
So that but one heart we can make of it.
Two bosoms interchainèd with an oath,
So then two bosoms and a single troth.
Then by your side no bed-room me deny,
For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.
HERMIA Lysander riddles very prettily.
Now much beshrew my manners and my pride,
If Hermia meant to say Lysander lied.
But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy
Lie further off: in human modesty,
Such separation as may well be said
Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid,
So far be distant, and good night, sweet friend;
Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life end.
LYSANDER Amen, amen, to that fair prayer, say I;
And then end life when I end loyalty.
Here is my bed; sleep give thee all his rest.
HERMIA With half that wish the wisher's eyes be pressed!

[They lie down and sleep, as PUCK enters]

PUCK Through the forest have I gone,
But Athenian found I none,
On whose eyes I might approve
This flower's force in stirring love.
Night and silence – Who is here?
Weeds of Athens he doth wear:
This is he, my master said,
Despisèd the Athenian maid;
And here the maiden, sleeping sound,
On the dank and dirty ground.
Pretty soul, she durst not lie
Near this lack-love, this kill-courtesy.
Churl, upon thy eyes I throw

49–50 **Two bosoms … a single troth:** Lysander is arguing that their two hearts have sworn to a single pledge of love.

71 **Weeds of Athens:** Clothes of Athens.

78 **Churl:** An inconsiderate person who is lacking in manners.

All the power this charm doth owe.
When thou wak'st, let love forbid
Sleep his seat on thy eyelid.
So awake when I am gone,
For I must now to Oberon.

[PUCK exits; DEMETRIUS and HELENA enter, running]

HELENA Stay, though thou kill me, sweet Demetrius.
DEMETRIUS I charge thee, hence, and do not haunt me thus.
HELENA O, wilt thou darkling leave me? Do not so.
DEMETRIUS Stay, on thy peril; I alone will go.

[DEMETRIUS exits]

HELENA O, I am out of breath in this fond chase!
The more my prayer, the lesser is my grace.
Happy is Hermia, wheresoe'er she lies;
For she hath blessèd and attractive eyes.
How came her eyes so bright? Not with salt tears;
If so, my eyes are oft'ner washed than hers.
No, no, I am as ugly as a bear,
For beasts that meet me run away for fear.
Therefore no marvel, though Demetrius
Do as a monster fly my presence thus.
What wicked and dissembling glass of mine
Made me compare with Hermia's sphery eyne?
But who is here? Lysander, on the ground?
Dead? Or asleep? I see no blood, no wound.
Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake.
LYSANDER *[Awakening]* And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake.
Transparent Helena! Nature shows art,
That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart.
Where is Demetrius? O, how fit a word
Is that vile name to perish on my sword!
HELENA Do not say so, Lysander; say not so.
What though he love your Hermia? Lord, what though?
Yet Hermia still loves you: then be content.
LYSANDER Content with Hermia! No; I do repent
The tedious minutes I with her have spent.
Not Hermia but Helena I love;
Who will not change a raven for a dove?

86 **Wilt thou darkling leave me:** Will you leave me in the dark?
98–99 **What wicked … sphery eyne:** Helena is calling her mirror wicked for deceiving her into thinking that her eyes could possibly be compared to Hermia's starry eyes.
104 **Transparent:** Radiant or clear (beautiful).

The will of man is by his reason swayed,
And reason says you are the worthier maid.
Things growing are not ripe until their season,
So I, being young, till now ripe not to reason.
And touching now the point of human skill,
Reason becomes the marshal to my will,
And leads me to your eyes, where I o'erlook
Love's stories written in love's richest book.

HELENA Wherefore was I to this keen mockery born?
When at your hands did I deserve this scorn?
Is't not enough, is't not enough, young man,
That I did never, no, nor never can,
Deserve a sweet look from Demetrius' eye,
But you must flout my insufficiency?
Good troth, you do me wrong; good sooth, you do,
In such disdainful manner me to woo.
But fare you well: perforce I must confess
I thought you lord of more true gentleness.
O, that a lady, of one man refused.
Should of another therefore be abused!

[HELENA exits]

LYSANDER She sees not Hermia – Hermia, sleep thou there,
And never mayst thou come Lysander near!
For as a surfeit of the sweetest things
The deepest loathing to the stomach brings,
Or as the heresies that men do leave
Are hated most of those they did deceive,
So thou, my surfeit and my heresy,
Of all be hated, but the most of me!
And, all my powers, address your love and might
To honour Helen and to be her knight!

[LYSANDER exits]

HERMIA *[Awakening]* Help me, Lysander; help me! Do thy best
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!
Ay me, for pity! What a dream was here!
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear:
Methought a serpent ate my heart away,

120–22 **Reason becomes … love's richest book:** Lysander is arguing that now he is more mature, his reason leads him to Helena's eyes where he reads love as in a book.

131 **Perforce:** By force; violently.

139–41 **Or as the heresies … and my heresy:** Lysander is comparing his transfer of affection from Hermia to Helena to someone abandoning religious heresy for true faith. He uses the word 'surfeit', which means excess, to reinforce the idea that he is sick of Hermia.

And you sat smiling at his cruèl prey.
Lysander! What, removed? Lysander! Lord!
What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?
Alack, where are you? Speak, and if you hear.
Speak, of all loves! I swoon almost with fear.
No? Then I well perceive you are not nigh.
Either death or you I'll find immediately.

[HERMIA exits]

QUESTIONS

1 What animals does Oberon hope that Titania might wake to and thus fall in love with? Why does Oberon desire this?

2 Why do Lysander and Hermia stop to rest?

3 Why does Hermia want Lysander to lie further away? What argument does she use to persuade him to do so?

4 Puck anoints Lysander's eyelids with the juice of the flower. In what way has he carried out Oberon's instructions incorrectly?

5 Draw up and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of Lysander's language upon awaking to Helena (lines 103–44). Begin by finding examples of the poetic devices he uses. In the right-hand column, write several dot points explaining what you think Shakespeare is trying to show us through Lysander's heightened poetic language. Is Lysander's love real?

Poetic device	Examples used by Lysander	What this language shows about Lysander
Descriptive language		
Hyperbole (see p.84)		
Rhyming couplets		
Rhyming with Helena's lines		
Bird imagery		
Others?		

6 What does Lysander mean in line 114 when he asks, 'Who will not change a raven for a dove?' What poetic device is he using?

7 What is Helena's reaction to Lysander's pleas of love?

8 Could Hermia's dream be prophetic (reflecting something that is going to happen)?

9 Hermia is afraid when she wakes without Lysander. Draw up and complete a table, as below, to show your understanding of the various language features that Shakespeare uses to convey Hermia's fear.

Language feature	Examples from Act 2 Scene 2
Sentence length	
Punctuation	
Specific words used	
The sound of Hermia's words	
Other?	

10 Now it is time to modify your relationship diagram (see page 35). Use a different colour to show who loves whom when under the influence of Puck's love juice.

& EXTEND

1 Hermia seems to think Lysander is being a little too slick or smooth in his arguments.
   - **a** What features of Lysander's language may lead her to think this?
   - **b** In what ways does Lysander's language change after he agrees to lie further away?

2 How does Puck misinterpret Lysander's lying apart from Helena? How is this particularly ironic?

3 To what does Lysander compare his former love for Hermia? What poetic device is he using in doing this?

4 In lines 44–58, the characters pun on the word 'lie'. In what two ways is the word being used? What might Shakespeare be suggesting about the characters and the nature of love by using this play on words?

5 How does Lysander's phrase 'Hermia, sleep thou there' (line 135) convey his new emotional distance from her?

6 After Lysander awakes in love with Helena, he claims he is being swayed by reason. Explain his argument. How does the context make this claim ironic?

7 Do you think the flower 'love-in-idleness' (Act 2 Scene 1, line 168) could be a metaphor for the way romantic love works? Does it shed any light on the reality of romantic love?

8 In your notes, draw up a table like the one below to show your understanding of the ways in which Lysander's language has changed from the beginning to the end of this scene. Hint: use your responses to Question 5 on page 64 for examples.

Lysander's language at the beginning of Act 2 Scene 2	Lysander's language at the end of Act 2 Scene 2	Why has Lysander's language changed?

1 What can the audience tell about Helena's character from this scene? Discuss this in terms of her self-image.

2 Shakespeare uses exaggerated and poetic language in this scene to highlight Lysander's potion-induced love for Helena. As a director of this scene, how might you support Shakespeare's language with a range of theatrical devices to emphasise the 'unreal' nature of Lysander's love? Discuss aspects such as lighting, sound, blocking (movement and position on the stage), Lysander's actions and even how he might deliver his lines (think about the stage directions you might add).

Introducing dramatic irony

Imagine your friend is making fun of someone and does not know (but you do!) that your teacher is standing right behind them. How would you feel? Tense? Like diving across in slow motion and shouting, 'Nooooo!'? This is what **dramatic irony** is all about. Sometimes while viewing a play, we are placed in the position of knowing more than the characters on stage. This creates dramatic tension between the characters' limited knowledge and our greater knowledge.

Shakespeare's tragedies such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello* contain a great deal of dramatic irony. We (the audience) often know things that the characters don't and this can create a sense of tension, as well as a desire to stop the characters from saying or doing things that might lead to harm.

Sometimes, though, dramatic irony can be harmless or even humorous, and we experience mild amusement rather than tension. The television show *The Simpsons* often employs this kind of humorous irony. For example, in the 'Brother from Another

Planet' episode, we know that Homer has been told to pick up Bart. While he struggles to remember what he has forgotten to do, the family dog, Santa's Little Helper, makes the barking sound 'Bart, Bart!' and Maggie's burp sounds just like the word 'Bart'. Meanwhile, the television screen that Homer is watching flashes the word 'BART' for a retiring football player and fans roll out a banner with the words 'We'll never forget you, Bart' written in huge letters. Finally, in response to all of these reminders, Homer shouts, 'I can't think with all this noise!' Here, the fact that we know what Homer is supposed to be remembering creates comedy.

Much of the comedy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is created through dramatic irony. The audience knows why Lysander has woken up in love with Helena. Lysander, however, does not know this and claims his love is reasonable, that it makes sense. Helena does not know about Puck's mischief and is understandably baffled by Lysander's speeches. A more subtle example of dramatic irony in this scene is when the fairies sing to ward off 'spotted snakes', 'hedgehogs', 'spiders', 'beetles' and 'snails' (lines 20–23). The audience knows (but Titania and her fairies do not) that Oberon is going to visit Titania and cause her to fall in love with the next creature that she sees.

Look for more instances of dramatic irony in Act 3, especially with the two pairs of lovers and in the romance between Titania and Bottom.

Act 3

Act 3 Scene 1

CHARACTERS

Bottom
Titania
Quince
Puck
Flute
Snout
Starveling
Peaseblossom
Cobweb
Mustardseed
Moth
Snug

IN A NUTSHELL

The actors meet in the woods to rehearse their play. They discuss the potential problems in performance and make several changes. Puck stumbles upon the group mid-rehearsal and, when no-one is looking, gives Bottom the head of a donkey (or an ass). When Bottom re-enters to speak his lines, the other actors panic and run away in terror. Assuming this to be some kind of joke, Bottom walks up and down singing. His singing wakes Titania, who, under the influence of the love potion, proclaims her love for him. Titania insists that Bottom remain in the forest and commands her fairies to attend to all his needs.

Before you read

- When the actors start performing their lines, it is important to note that they are particularly bad actors (ham actors) with a woeful script. For maximum comic effect, you should consider reading Bottom's lines melodramatically, and Flute should be unconvincing or hesitant in his delivery. If you play Quince, you will certainly be frustrated by the actors' inability to follow cues and simple instructions.
- When the group decides another Prologue must be written, Quince suggests that the speech 'shall be written in eight and six' (lines 17–18), which means a line of eight beats followed by a line of six beats. You can see an example of this sort of rhythm in the song that Bottom sings after everyone deserts him. Bottom suggests the Prologue be written in 'eight and eight', so that each line is equal in length.
- The song Bottom sings while he walks up and down mentions various birds. The 'ousel cock' (pronounced *woozle*) is a male bird and the 'throstle' is a different kind of singing bird. 'Quill' is the sound of the bird's piping song.

Pat: Punctually; on time
Prologue: A spoken introduction to a play
Abide: Stay (or, in this case, tolerate)
Almanac: Calendar
Knavery: Trickery
Wit: Intelligence
Gleek: Make a joke

You speak all your part at once, cues and all …

Elizabethan theatre

There were no professional theatre companies in England when Shakespeare was born, but Mystery plays were performed in some major towns. These plays were usually based on stories from the Bible such as Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, and events from the life of Jesus. Rather than professional actors, local tradesmen or artisans (like Bottom and his friends) performed these plays.

Professional theatre companies grew in London during the 1570s and 1580s. These acting companies also toured throughout some of the larger towns and cities, particularly at times when the London theatres were closed down due to outbreaks of the plague. A few different theatre companies performed in Shakespeare's hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon when Shakespeare was a boy; some historians have even suggested that he might have originally joined one of these theatre companies when it was passing through. Whichever way, Shakespeare arrived in London some time in the mid to late 1580s.

Printing was very expensive in Shakespeare's day and copyright did not exist. Theatre companies were very protective of their play scripts, which could be stolen by a rival theatre company or even by publishers. For this reason, the actors would be given only the lines they would speak, and the line before they spoke. When Quince despairs that Flute is speaking his entire 'part at once, cues and all', he is complaining that Flute, inexperienced in acting, is reading all the lines he has been given aloud without realising that other characters speak in between.

Elizabethan theatre companies generally used very few props. Shakespeare created scenery mainly through dialogue. For example, another of Shakespeare's plays, *Henry V*, begins with a Prologue (or an introductory chorus) that makes it clear that the audience will have to imagine fields, armies and even horses:

> Think when we talk of horses that you see them
> Printing their proud hoofs i'the receiving earth …
> (*Henry V*, Prologue, lines 27–28)

Part of the comedy created in the next scene centres on Bottom and the other actors not trusting their audience to have any sense of imagination, to the extent that they require actual moonlight, an actor to play a wall, and another actor to explain that he is not a real lion.

Finally, you should note that, in the theatre, the comedy of this play has another dimension. Quince tells his actors, who the audience imagine are in a wood, to pretend that this wood is a stage. But the audience, in reality, is viewing professional actors on a real stage. When Quince says the bush of the hawthorn brake can be their 'tiring-house' (or dressing room), it is not hard to imagine him pointing to the actual tiring-house.

Stage area of the New Globe Theatre in London

The wood. Titania lying asleep.

[QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE, SNOUT and STARVELING enter]

BOTTOM Are we all met?

QUINCE Pat, pat; and here's a marvellous convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring-house, and we will do it in action as we will do it before the Duke.

BOTTOM Peter Quince?

QUINCE What sayest thou, bully Bottom?

BOTTOM There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself, which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you that?

SNOUT By'r lakin, a parlous fear!

STARVELING I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is done.

BOTTOM Not a whit: I have a device to make all well. Write me a Prologue, and

3 **Hawthorn-brake:** A thicket or dense bush.

6 **Bully:** Something like 'old mate'.

10 **By'r lakin, a parlous fear:** By our Lady (the Virgin Mary), that is definitely something to be feared ('parlous' = dangerous or perilous).

12 **Not a whit:** Not at all.

let the Prologue seem to say, we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and, for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear.

QUINCE Well, we will have such a Prologue, and it shall be written in eight and six.

BOTTOM No, make it two more; let it be written in eight and eight.

SNOUT Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

STARVELING I fear it, I promise you.

BOTTOM Masters, you ought to consider with yourselves: to bring in, God shield us, a lion among ladies, is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living; and we ought to look to it.

SNOUT Therefore, another Prologue must tell he is not a lion.

BOTTOM Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck; and he himself must speak through, saying thus, or to the same defect, *'Ladies,'* or *'Fair-ladies, I would wish you,'* or *'I would request you,'* or *'I would entreat you not to fear, not to tremble; my life for yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life. No, I am no such thing; I am a man as other men are'*; and there indeed let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner.

QUINCE Well, it shall be so. But there is two hard things: that is, to bring the moonlight into a chamber; for, you know, Pyramus and Thisbe meet by moonlight.

SNOUT Doth the moon shine that night we play our play?

BOTTOM A calendar, a calendar! Look in the almanac! Find out moonshine; find out Moonshine!

QUINCE Yes, it doth shine that night.

BOTTOM Why, then may you leave a casement of the great chamber window, where we play, open, and the moon may shine in at the casement.

QUINCE Ay; or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lanthorn, and say he comes to disfigure, or to present, the person of Moonshine. Then, there is another thing: we must have a wall in the great chamber, for Pyramus and Thisbe, says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.

SNOUT You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?

BOTTOM Some man or other must present Wall; and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast about him, to signify Wall; and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisbe whisper.

QUINCE If that may be, then all is well. Come, sit down, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts. Pyramus, you begin. When you have spoken your speech, enter into that brake; and so everyone according to his cue.

[PUCK enters behind them]

48 **Loam:** Mortar; **Rough-cast:** Lime and gravel mixture for plastering walls.

PUCK What hempen home-spuns have we swaggering here,
So near the cradle of the Fairy Queen?
What, a play toward? I'll be an auditor;
An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause.

QUINCE Speak, Pyramus. Thisbe, stand forth.

BOTTOM *'Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet –'*

QUINCE Odours, odours.

BOTTOM *'– odours savours sweet:*
So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisbe dear.
But hark, a voice! Stay thou but here awhile,
And by and by I will to thee appear.'

[BOTTOM exits]

PUCK A stranger Pyramus than e'er played here.

[PUCK exits, following BOTTOM]

FLUTE Must I speak now?

QUINCE Ay, marry, must you; for you must understand he goes but to see a noise that he heard, and is to come again.

FLUTE *'Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,*
Of colour like the red rose on triumphant brier,
Most brisky juvenal and eke most lovely Jew,
As true as truest horse that yet would never tire,
I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.'

QUINCE 'Ninus' tomb,' man. Why, you must not speak that yet: that you answer to Pyramus; you speak all your part at once, cues and all – Pyramus, enter: your cue is past; it is, 'never tire.'

FLUTE *O – 'As true as truest horse, that yet would never tire.'*

[PUCK re-enters, followed by BOTTOM wearing the head of an ass]

BOTTOM *'If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine –'*

QUINCE O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted. Pray, masters! Fly, masters! Help!

[QUINCE, SNUG, FLUTE, SNOUT and STARVELING exit]

PUCK I'll follow you; I'll lead you about a round,
Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier;
Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,
A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire;
And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,
Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.

[PUCK exits]

56 **What, a play toward? I'll be an auditor:** What, a play in preparation. I'll be a member of the audience.

71 **Brisky juvenal:** Lively young man; **Eke:** Also; **Jew:** A term of affection, perhaps short for jewel; in this case, forced to rhyme with 'hue'.

BOTTOM Why do they run away? This is a knavery of them to make me afeard.

[SNOUT re-enters]

SNOUT O Bottom, thou art changed! What do I see on thee?

BOTTOM What do you see? You see an asshead of your own, do you?

[SNOUT exits; QUINCE re-enters]

QUINCE Bless thee, Bottom! Bless thee! Thou art translated.

[QUINCE exits]

BOTTOM I see their knavery. This is to make an ass of me, to fright me, if they could. But I will not stir from this place; do what they can. I will walk up and down here, and I will sing, that they shall hear I am not afraid.

[Singing]

The ousel cock so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill.

TITANIA *[Awakening]* What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?

BOTTOM *The finch, the sparrow and the lark,*
The plain-song cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark,
And dares not answer nay –
– for, indeed, who would set his wit to so foolish a bird? Who would give a bird the lie, though he cry 'cuckoo' never so?

TITANIA I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:
Mine ear is much enamoured of thy note,
So is mine eye enthrallèd to thy shape;
And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me
On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

BOTTOM Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that;
and yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together now-a-days. The more the pity that some honest neighbours will not make them friends. Nay, I can gleek upon occasion.

TITANIA Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.

BOTTOM Not so, neither. But if I had wit enough to get out of this wood,
I have enough to serve mine own turn.

TITANIA Out of this wood do not desire to go;
Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.

104–05 **Who would … 'cuckoo' never so:** Who would test his wits or intelligence against such a stupid bird? Who would make the effort to accuse the bird of lying, however much it said 'cuckoo'? 'Cuckoo' is almost certainly a pun on 'cuckold'. A cuckold is a husband who has been cheated on by his wife.

116–17 **But I had wit … mine own turn:** Bottom is saying that, if he had the intelligence ('wit') to find a way out of the woods, he would be pleased.

I am a spirit of no common rate;
The summer still doth tend upon my state;
And I do love thee. Therefore, go with me:
I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,
And they shall fetch thee jewèls from the deep,
And sing while thou on pressèd flowers dost sleep;
And I will purge thy mortal grossness so
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.
Peaseblossom! Cobweb! Moth! And Mustardseed!

[PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH and MUSTARDSEED enter]

PEASEBLOSSOM Ready.
COBWEB And I.
MOTH And I.
MUSTARDSEED And I.
ALL Where shall we go?
TITANIA Be kind and courteous to this gentleman.
Hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes;
Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;
The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees,
And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs,
And light them at the fiery glow-worm's eyes,
To have my love to bed and to arise;
And pluck the wings from painted butterflies
To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes.
Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies.
PEASEBLOSSOM Hail, mortal!
COBWEB Hail!
MOTH Hail!
MUSTARDSEED Hail!
BOTTOM I cry your worship's mercy, heartily; I beseech your worship's name.
COBWEB Cobweb.
BOTTOM I shall desire you of more acquaintance, good Master Cobweb; if I cut my finger, I shall make bold with you – Your name, honest gentleman?
PEASEBLOSSOM Peaseblossom.

126–27 **And I will purge … an airy spirit go:** Titania is saying that she will remove Bottom's human or mortal nature and change him into a member of the fairy world.

135 **Hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes:** Dance in front of him ('gambol' = leap away).

139 **And for night-tapers crop their waxen thighs:** Titania is commanding the fairies to take wax from the thighs of bees to make candles ('night-tapers').

144 **Courtesies:** Favours.

151–52 **If I cut my finger, I shall make bold with you:** Bottom is saying that if he cuts his finger, he can use some cobweb (as a bandaid) to stop the bleeding. Here, Bottom is playing on the name of the Fairy, Cobweb.

BOTTOM I pray you, commend me to Mistress Squash, your mother, and to Master Peascod, your father. Good Master Peaseblossom, I shall desire you of more acquaintance too – Your name, I beseech you, sir?

MUSTARDSEED Mustardseed.

BOTTOM Good Master Mustardseed, I know your patience well; that same cowardly, giant-like ox-beef hath devoured many a gentleman of your house. I promise you your kindred had made my eyes water ere now. I desire your more acquaintance, good Master Mustardseed.

TITANIA Come, wait upon him; lead him to my bower.
The moon methinks looks with a watery eye;
And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,
Lamenting some enforcèd chastity.
Tie up my love's tongue; bring him silently.

[All exit]

154–55 **Squash:** Unripe peascod; **Peascod:** A ripe peapod (a remedy for lovesickness).

158–60 **That same cowardly … a gentleman of your house:** Bottom is making a joke that cowardly and gigantic sides of beef have been eaten with many of Mustardseed's relations (members of his house). Beef is often flavoured with plenty of mustard.

163–65 **The moon methinks … enforcèd chastity:** Titania is saying that the moon seems misty-eyed and the flowers seem to be weeping because of some violated ('enforcèd') chastity. Alternatively, 'enforcèd' could be read as 'a forced chastity' (perhaps reflective of Hermia's situation at the hands of the Athenian law). The flowers appear to weep because they are covered with dew, which Elizabethans believed came down from the moon.

QUESTIONS

1 Draw up a table like the one below to show your understanding of the problems that Bottom has with the play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, they are to perform. Allow three or four lines for each aspect.

Aspect of *Pyramus and Thisbe*	Bottom's concern with the play	Bottom's solution to this problem	What do you think of Bottom's solution?	How would *you* solve Bottom's concern?
Violence				
Lion				
Wall	*Difficulty of bringing a wall on stage*	*An actor can play the part of the wall*		
Moonlight				

2 What can the audience tell about Bottom's personality from the manner in which he raises his concerns about various aspects of their play and from the way he proposes his solutions? Give evidence to support your answer.

3 Puck describes the actors as 'hempen home-spuns'. Given the *sound* of these words, what do you think Puck means by this?

4 The character of Thisbe (played by Flute) describes her lover in these words: 'As true as truest horse that yet would never tire' (line 77). How is this an inappropriate or unromantic comparison?

5 When Bottom returns to his friends with the head of an ass, his actor friends are afraid (see lines 78–80). Construct and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of how Shakespeare uses various language features to capture their fear.

Language features	Examples from lines 78–80
Short sentences	
Punctuation	
Repetition	
Interrupting Bottom	
Other?	

6 How does Titania describe Bottom? How does Bottom react to this description?

7 In what way is Titania calling Bottom a 'gentleman' ironic (line 134)?

8 Titania says of Bottom: 'So is mine eye enthrallèd to thy shape' (line 108). In what way is this statement ironic?

& EXTEND

1 Can you find any evidence in this scene of the other actors' love and respect for Bottom?

2 Bottom asks his friends, 'What do you see? You see an asshead of your own, do you?' (line 89). How is this ironic?

3 How would you describe Titania's use of language? How does it contrast to Bottom's use of language?

4 Bottom says that 'reason and love keep little company together nowadays' (line 112). What does he mean by this? How is this statement illustrated in the previous scene?

5 When Bottom says 'or to the same defect' (line 28), what does he mean rather than 'defect'? Can you find another example where a character has used the wrong word for something? (These are called **malapropisms**; for a more detailed explanation, see the box on page 116.)

Michael Hoffman: DVD Chapter 13 (Bottom becomes an ass and meets Titania)

1. How does Hoffman show Bottom being transformed?
2. Do you like the way he presents the transformation? Why or why not? How else might he have presented it?
3. In what ways does Hoffman emphasise the mechanicals' fear? How does he make it comic?
4. Titania is obviously displayed as the more powerful figure in the relationship after she wakes to find Bottom. How does Hoffman make this power dynamic clear?
5. What techniques does Hoffman use to make Bottom's new life in the Fairy Kingdom seem particularly exotic? Consider such devices as props, lighting, music, colour and camera work.
6. **Diegetic sound** is the sound contained in the world of the film (e.g. characters talking or moving things about). When Bottom puts a record on the gramophone, this is an example of diegetic sound. How does Hoffman use diegetic music in this scene (as opposed to the non-diegetic soundtrack, which the characters do not hear)? What is the effect of this music on the fairies?

Illusion and reality

One of the central ideas of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the ambiguous or unclear relationship between illusion and reality. To begin with, the very title of the play hints at the shadowy, dream-like quality of the reality that is experienced by Shakespeare's characters. How much of what occurs is really a dream or the workings of an over-active imagination in a forest at night?

The opening scene establishes the thematic focus of fantasy or illusion. We are firstly introduced to Theseus and Hippolyta, who, about to be married in four days' time, speak of 'quickly dream[ing]' away the time' (Act 1 Scene 1, line 8). Then we hear from Egeus, who claims that his daughter Hermia has 'by moonlight' been 'bewitched': that Lysander, by 'feigning love', has 'stolen the impression of her fantasy' (lines 27–33).

The idea of illusion or imagination is also powerfully linked with the other major theme of the play, namely, the irrational nature of love. Are the characters really in love with each other? If they are, why do they so quickly fall in love with someone else? Is it just Puck's magic or is Shakespeare implying something about human nature? Does Titania truly fall in love with Bottom, who has the head of an ass? Are we to agree with Bottom, who tells Titania, 'Reason and love keep little company together now-a-days' (Act 3 Scene 1, line 112)?

Perhaps the most obvious blurring of the boundary between illusion and reality is Shakespeare's representation of the Fairy Kingdom, sometimes parallel to and sometimes interacting with the human characters. The fairies' magic, which defies any rational explanation, occurs in an enchanted forest at night, specifically by moonlight. In this setting, mischief is performed, a love potion causes various characters to fall in love, and Bottom is transformed into half-man, half-donkey. These occurrences are certainly a stretch of anyone's imagination.

Shakespeare's language reinforces this blurring between what is real and what is not. You will have noticed the frequent repetition of words such as 'dream', 'sleep', 'awake' and 'shadows' (referring to the fairy world) in Acts 1 to 3 (e.g. Act 1 Scene 1, lines 7–11 and 141–54; Act 2 Scene 2, lines 37–44). These words are repeated as the play continues; keep a lookout for them in Acts 4 and 5.

One particular aspect of illusion explored by Shakespeare is that of actually performing a play. When watching a play being performed, while not for a minute believing the characters to be real, we are willing to 'suspend our disbelief' and enter into their world, to enter the illusion. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the characters who are playing actors (the mechanicals) ridiculously wish to inform their audience that they are just acting, that they are not real. Instead of having their audience imagine moonlight, or a wall, or a lion, Bottom and his friends are such terrible actors that they actually speak to their audience; for example, they explain to the ladies (who might scream with fright) that Snug is only *pretending* to be a lion. These ham actors totally destroy the illusion of acting by drawing attention to the artificiality of their performance. They add greatly to the humour of Shakespeare's play but also, ironically, reinforce the notion of the clash between illusion and reality. Even Puck, in his closing speech (epilogue), reminds us that the play is not real, that it is an illusion, a dream:

> If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this, and all is mended,
> That you have but slumbered here
> While these visions did appear … (Act 5 Scene 1, lines 395–98)

By the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, both human characters and fairies query the reality of what has occurred. Both groups entertain the possibility that the events may have been imagined, that it all could have been 'a dream'. Look out for this viewpoint as expressed by Demetrius (Act 4 Scene 1, lines 187–94), Bottom (Act 4 Scene 1, lines 197–206) and Puck (Act 5 Scene 1, lines 395–402). After all, as put by Theseus in the final scene (lines 21–22), 'in the night, imagining some fear, / How easy is a bush supposed a bear?'

Act 3 Scene 2 (Part 1)

CHARACTERS

Puck
Oberon
Hermia
Demetrius

IN A NUTSHELL

Puck reports to Oberon what has happened to the actors, and that Titania has fallen in love with Bottom. As they talk, Hermia and Demetrius enter arguing about the whereabouts of Lysander. Hermia accuses Demetrius of murdering him, and Demetrius decides to give up pursuing her, and lies down to sleep. Oberon is furious with Puck and sends him away to find Helena, before anointing Demetrius' eyelids with the juice of the love-flower.

Before you read

- Don't forget to keep updating your relationship diagram (see page 35). It can become confusing, especially in Act 3. Of course, Shakespeare wants it to be confusing!

V

Mechanicals: Tradesmen
Brake: A dense bush or thicket
Chide: Tell someone off or criticise them
Rebuke: Chide or reprimand
Yonder: Over there
Cur: Dog
Aught: Anything
Woo: Try to win someone's heart or affection

Another part of the wood.

[OBERON enters]

OBERON I wonder if Titania be awaked;
Then, what it was that next came in her eye,
Which she must dote on in extremity.

[PUCK enters]

Here comes my messenger. How now, mad spirit!
What night-rule now about this haunted grove?
PUCK My mistress with a monster is in love.

Near to her close and consecrated bower,
While she was in her dull and sleeping hour,
A crew of patches, rude mechanicals,
That work for bread upon Athenian stalls,
Were met together to rehearse a play
Intended for great Theseus' nuptial-day.
The shallowest thick-skin of that barren sort,
Who Pyramus presented, in their sport
Forsook his scene and entered in a brake,
When I did him at this advantage take,
An ass's nole I fixèd on his head.
Anon his Thisbe must be answerèd,
And forth my mimic comes. When they him spy,
As wild geese that the creeping fowler eye,
Or russet-pated choughs, many in sort,
Rising and cawing at the gun's report,
Sever themselves and madly sweep the sky,
So, at his sight, away his fellows fly;
And, at our stamp, here o'er and o'er one falls;
He murder cries and help from Athens calls.
Their sense thus weak, lost with their fears thus strong,
Made senseless things begin to do them wrong.
For briers and thorns at their apparel snatch;
Some sleeves, some hats, from yielders all things catch.
I led them on in this distracted fear,
And left sweet Pyramus translated there;
When in that moment, so it came to pass,
Titania waked and straightway loved an ass.

OBERON This falls out better than I could devise.
But hast thou yet latched the Athenians eyes
With the love-juice, as I did bid thee do?

PUCK I took him sleeping (that is finished too),
And the Athenian woman by his side,
That, when he waked, of force she must be eyed.

[HERMIA and DEMETRIUS enter]

7 **Near to her close and consecrated bower:** Near to her private and blessed leafy shelter.

9 **Patches:** Clowns; **Rude mechanicals:** Uneducated manual workers or tradesmen.

13 **The shallowest thick-skin of that barren sort:** The most stupid of that stupid group. He is describing Bottom.

17 **An ass's nole:** A donkey's head.

18–19 **Thisbe must be answered / And forth my mimic comes:** The actor (mimic) enters to answer his cue.

19–24 **When they him spy … away his fellows fly:** Puck is stating that the actors madly scattered at the sight of Bottom as wild geese or reddish-brown jackdaws do when a hunter fires a gun.

OBERON Stand close. This is the same Athenian.
PUCK This is the woman, but not this the man.
DEMETRIUS O, why rebuke you him that loves you so?
Lay breath so bitter on your bitter foe.
HERMIA Now I but chide, but I should use thee worse;
For thou, I fear, hast given me cause to curse,
If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep,
Being o'er shoes in blood, plunge in the deep,
And kill me too.
The sun was not so true unto the day
As he to me; would he have stolen away
From sleeping Hermia? I'll believe as soon
This whole earth may be bored and that the moon
May through the centre creep and so displease
Her brother's noontide with th'Antipodes.
It cannot be but thou hast murdered him;
So should a murderer look, so dead, so grim.
DEMETRIUS So should the murdered look, and so should I,
Pierced through the heart with your stern cruelty.
Yet you, the murderer, look as bright, as clear,
As yonder Venus in her glimmering sphere.
HERMIA What's this to my Lysander? Where is he?
Ah, good Demetrius, wilt thou give him me?
DEMETRIUS I had rather give his carcass to my hounds.
HERMIA Out, dog! Out, cur! Thou driv'st me past the bounds
Of maiden's patience. Hast thou slain him, then?
Henceforth be never numbered among men!
O, once tell true, tell true, even for my sake!
Durst thou have looked upon him being awake,
And hast thou killed him sleeping? O brave touch!
Could not a worm, an adder, do so much?
An adder did it; for with doubler tongue
Than thine, thou serpent, never adder stung.
DEMETRIUS You spend your passion on a misprised mood:
I am not guilty of Lysander's blood;
Nor is he dead, for aught that I can tell.
HERMIA I pray thee, tell me then that he is well.
DEMETRIUS And if I could, what should I get therefore?
HERMIA A privilege never to see me more.
And from thy hated presence part I so;

52–55 **I'll believe as soon … noontide with Antipodes:** Hermia is saying that the idea of Lysander leaving her is about as believable as the moon creeping through the centre of the earth to confuse the day on the other side of the world ('Antipodes' = the other side of the world).

74 **Misprised mood:** Mistaken anger.

See me no more, whether he be dead or no.

[HERMIA exits]

DEMETRIUS
There is no foll'wing her in this fierce vein:
Here, therefore, for a while I will remain.
So sorrow's heaviness doth heavier grow
For debt that bankrupt sleep doth sorrow owe;
Which now in some slight measure it will pay,
If for his tender here I make some stay.

[DEMETRIUS lies down and sleeps]

OBERON
What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite
And laid the love-juice on some true-love's sight;
Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
Some true love turned and not a false turned true.

PUCK
Then fate o'er-rules, that, one man holding troth,
A million fail, confounding oath on oath.

OBERON
About the wood go swifter than the wind,
And Helena of Athens look thou find.
All fancy-sick she is and pale of cheer,
With sighs of love, that costs the fresh blood dear.
By some illusion see thou bring her here;
I'll charm his eyes against she do appear.

PUCK
I go, I go; look how I go,
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.

[PUCK exits]

OBERON
Flower of this purple dye,
Hit with Cupid's archery,
Sink in apple of his eye.
When his love he doth espy,
Let her shine as gloriously
As the Venus of the sky.

84–87 **So sorrow's heaviness … I make some stay:** The weight of sorrow grows heavier for lack of sleep, so Demetrius decides to rest. This is an extended metaphor (or conceit) that draws upon the language of banking or commerce; like a bankrupt person, he waits for sleep to make an offer ('tender') to repay its debt.

90–91 **Of thy misprision … false turned true:** Oberon is saying that Puck's mistakes are turning a true lover away from true love (Lysander), instead of setting a false lover (Demetrius) on the right path ('misprision' = error).

92–93 **Then fate o'er-rules … oath on oath:** Fate has determined that for one man who keeps his promises, a million others break theirs, one oath cancelling another.

101 **Tartar's bow:** A powerful bow from central Asia.

105 **Espy:** See or spy.

107 **Venus:** The Roman goddess of beauty and love; also referring here to the evening star (the planet Venus).

When thou wak'st, if she be by,
Beg of her for remedy.

[PUCK re-enters]

PUCK Captain of our fairy band,
Helena is here at hand;
And the youth, mistook by me,
Pleading for a lover's fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!

OBERON Stand aside: the noise they make
Will cause Demetrius to awake.

PUCK Then will two at once woo one:
That must needs be sport alone;
And those things do best please me
That befall preposterously.

114 **Fond pageant:** Foolish spectacle or scene.

120–21 **And those things … befall preposterously:** Puck says that he enjoys things that fall out or happen in a preposterous or silly way. He is a mischief-maker after all.

QUESTIONS

1 What does Puck report has happened to the actors?
2 How does Oberon react to the news about Titania?
3 Of what does Hermia accuse Demetrius?
4 Hermia speaks of Lysander's faithfulness and asserts that he would never leave her. What do we know that she does not? What dramatic device is Shakespeare employing here?
5 Puck notes that two men (Demetrius and Lysander) will soon be wooing one woman (Helena). What is his attitude toward this situation?

EXTEND

1 Puck's speech at the beginning of this scene is basically re-telling an event that the audience has already witnessed. How does Shakespeare keep the audience interested at this point?
2 What does Puck mean when he says, 'Senseless things begin to do them wrong' (line 28)?
3 What do you think Demetrius means when he says, 'Lay breath so bitter on your bitter foe' (line 44)?
4 The audience learns (in line 95) that Oberon knows Helena's name. What might this suggest about Oberon's powers?
5 Draw up a table like the one on the following page to show your understanding of the way that Shakespeare shows Hermia's frustration with Demetrius through various language devices (lines 65–73).

Language devices	Examples from lines 65–73
Repetition of words	
Harsh-sounding words	
Short sentences	
Punctuation	
Imagery relating to animals	

DISCUSS

'And kill me too' (line 49) is only a four-beat line, which suggests a six-beat pause (remember: iambic pentameter has 10 beats per regular line). If you were directing this scene, what would you have Hermia do during this pause? Think particularly about her actions and also about blocking (movement and position on the stage). In your response, consider what effect or emotion you might wish to convey. You might refer back to the section on dramatic pauses in the introductory essay 'Shakespeare's language' on pages 13–14 for help with this question.

Introducing hyperbole

Hyperbole (*Hy-PER-bo-lee*) involves the use of a deliberately exaggerated statement to emphasise a point. It is a figure of speech and is not to be taken literally. Imagine something dreadful happens, so you exclaim, 'It's the end of the world!' It's not literally the end of the world, but we know what you mean: you are deliberately exaggerating to let us know that you are upset.

In one episode of the comedy television series *Flight of the Conchords*, one of the characters, Bret, is writing a love song for his girlfriend. The song lists all the things he would do for her to prove his love. The list includes climbing the highest mountain and swimming across the widest river. Jemaine asks him if he would actually do this and he replies: 'No. It's just a metaphor'. Pop songs, especially love songs, use this sort of over-the-top exaggeration or hyperbole all the time – correction: often (I'm doing it myself).

In the next scene, Lysander and Demetrius both use hyperbole to describe Helena's beauty and their love for her. Demetrius not only calls her a 'goddess' but also states that the whiteness of her skin makes snow appear dark as a crow. Later in the scene, when Lysander is insulting Hermia, he calls her an 'acorn', referring to her shortness. Obviously, both of these descriptions are gross exaggerations and, therefore, hyperbole.

Act 3 Scene 2 (Part 2)

CHARACTERS

Helena
Hermia
Lysander
Demetrius
Puck *(non-speaking role)*
Oberon *(non-speaking role)*

IN A NUTSHELL

Lysander enters with Helena, trying to convince her that his love is genuine. The two accidentally wake Demetrius, who, under the influence of the love potion, also proclaims his love for Helena. Believing the two men are making fun of her, Helena is deeply offended. When Hermia appears, Helena assumes that she is also part of a conspiracy against her. Hermia soon realises that Lysander is actually in love with Helena, so she insults Helena and threatens violence. The two men attempt to restrain Hermia before exiting to continue their fight offstage. Helena flees, leaving Hermia in despair.

Before you read

- Listen carefully to how Demetrius' use of language changes under the influence of the love potion. He is clearly not himself.

V

Derision:	Mocking or contempt
Sojourn:	Temporary stay
Wherefore:	Why
Forsooth:	In truth; certainly
Sport:	Entertainment
Bequeath:	Give me; hand over
Jest:	Joke around; make believe
Fray:	Fight

Another part of the wood.

[LYSANDER and HELENA enter; OBERON and PUCK are still on stage unobserved]

LYSANDER Why should you think that I should woo in scorn?
Scorn and derision never come in tears.
Look, when I vow, I weep; and vows so born,
In their nativity all truth appears. 125

124–25 **Look, when I vow … all truth appears:** Lysander is claiming that his vows are genuine because they are born in tears ('nativity' = birth).

How can these things in me seem scorn to you,
Bearing the badge of faith, to prove them true?

HELENA You do advance your cunning more and more.
When truth kills truth, O devilish-holy fray!
These vows are Hermia's. Will you give her o'er?
Weigh oath with oath, and you will nothing weigh.
Your vows to her and me, put in two scales,
Will even weigh, and both as light as tales.

LYSANDER I had no judgment when to her I swore.

HELENA Nor none, in my mind, now you give her o'er.

LYSANDER Demetrius loves her, and he loves not you.

DEMETRIUS *[Awakening]* O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!
To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne?
Crystal is muddy. O, how ripe in show
Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!
That pure congealèd white, high Taurus' snow,
Fanned with the eastern wind, turns to a crow
When thou hold'st up thy hand. O, let me kiss
This princess of pure white, this seal of bliss!

HELENA O spite! O hell! I see you all are bent
To set against me for your merriment.
If you were civil and knew courtesy,
You would not do me thus much injury.
Can you not hate me, as I know you do,
But you must join in souls to mock me too?
If you were men, as men you are in show,
You would not use a gentle lady so;
To vow, and swear, and superpraise my parts,
When I am sure you hate me with your hearts.
You both are rivals, and love Hermia;
And now both rivals, to mock Helena.
A trim exploit, a manly enterprise,
To conjure tears up in a poor maid's eyes
With your derision. None of noble sort
Would so offend a virgin, and extort
A poor soul's patience, all to make you sport.

LYSANDER You are unkind, Demetrius; be not so,

141–43 **That pure congealed … hold'st up thy hand:** The pure snow on the Turkish mountains, which is cooled or perhaps created by winds from the east, appears dark as a crow compared with Helena's hand. In Shakespeare's time, fair hair and white skin were thought to be more beautiful than a darker complexion; they were a sign of higher class, as those with a tanned complexion were more likely to have been labourers, working outside.

156 **And now both rivals, to mock Helena:** As Lysander and Demetrius were both previously competing rivals for Hermia's love and affection, Helena thinks they are now competing to mock her (Helena).

For you love Hermia; this you know I know.
And here, with all good will, with all my heart,
In Hermia's love I yield you up my part.
And yours of Helena to me bequeath,
Whom I do love and will do till my death.

HELENA Never did mockers waste more idle breath.

DEMETRIUS Lysander, keep thy Hermia: I will none.
If e'er I loved her, all that love is gone.
My heart to her but as guest-wise sojourned,
And now to Helen is it home returned,
There to remain.

LYSANDER Helen, it is not so.

DEMETRIUS Disparage not the faith thou dost not know,
Lest, to thy peril, thou aby it dear.
Look, where thy love comes; yonder is thy dear.

[HERMIA re-enters]

HERMIA Dark night, that from the eye his function takes,
The ear more quick of apprehension makes;
Wherein it doth impair the seeing sense,
It pays the hearing double recompense.
Thou art not by mine eye, Lysander, found;
Mine ear, I thank it, brought me to thy sound
But why unkindly didst thou leave me so?

LYSANDER Why should he stay, whom love doth press to go?

HERMIA What love could press Lysander from my side?

LYSANDER Lysander's love, that would not let him bide,
Fair Helena, who more engilds the night
Than all you fiery oes and eyes of light.
Why seek'st thou me? Could not this make thee know,
The hate I bear thee made me leave thee so?

HERMIA You speak not as you think: it cannot be.

HELENA Lo, she is one of this confederacy!
Now I perceive they have conjoined all three
To fashion this false sport, in spite of me.

171 **My heart to her but as guest-wise sojourned:** Demetrius is suggesting that his heart did not stay long with Hermia.

174–75 **Disparage not the faith … aby it dear:** Demetrius warns Lysander not to criticise ('disparage') a faithfulness he does not know, unless he is willing to pay for it. This is a threat.

177–80 **Dark night … hearing double recompense:** Night makes the eyes useless but enhances hearing ('recompense' = pay or reward).

186 **Bide:** Abide (in one syllable), meaning to stay.

187–88 **Fair Helena … and eyes of light:** Lysander is saying that Helena makes the night more beautiful than all the stars (circles of light that are shaped like 'oes' or 'eyes').

192 **Confederacy:** Plot or scheme.

Injurious Hermia! Most ungrateful maid!
Have you conspired, have you with these contrived
To bait me with this foul derision?
Is all the counsel that we two have shared,
The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,
When we have chid the hasty-footed time
For parting us? O, is it all forgot?
All school-days' friendship, childhood innocence?
We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,
Had been incorporate. So we grow together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition;
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;
So, with two seeming bodies, but one heart;
Two of the first, like coats in heraldry,
Due but to one and crownèd with one crest.
And will you rent our ancient love asunder,
To join with men in scorning your poor friend?
It is not friendly, 'tis not maidenly;
Our sex, as well as I, may chide you for it,
Though I alone do feel the injury.

HERMIA I am amazèd at your passionate words.
I scorn you not; it seems that you scorn me.

HELENA Have you not set Lysander, as in scorn,
To follow me and praise my eyes and face?
And made your other love, Demetrius,
Who even but now did spurn me with his foot,

203 **Artificial gods:** In Shakespeare's day, 'artificial' meant contrived or false as it does today, but it could also mean skilful or showing creative artistry. This seems to be what Helena means here. They are gods because they are involved in an act of creation. While the Greek gods were not involved in 'creation' as such, Shakespeare might have had the Christian view of God in mind here, making this image anachronistic.

208 **Incorporate:** Unite; make one.

210 **Partition:** Division.

213–14 **Two of the first … crownèd with one crest:** Shakespeare's analogy here uses the language of heraldry, which concerns the colours and patterns on a coat of arms. Helena suggests that she and Hermia are like two coats of arms with the same background and under the same crest. Again, she is suggesting in this image that they are almost identical.

218–19 **Our sex … do feel the injury:** Helena is saying that women in general may criticise ('chide') Hermia for insulting Helena in this way, but she is the one feeling the insult ('injury').

To call me goddess, nymph, divine and rare,
Precious, celestial? Wherefore speaks he this
To her he hates? And wherefore doth Lysander
Deny your love, so rich within his soul,
And tender me, forsooth, affection,
But by your setting on, by your consent?
What thought I be not so in grace as you,
So hung upon with love, so fortunate,
But miserable most, to love unloved?
This you should pity rather than despise.

HERMIA I understand not what you mean by this.

HELENA Ay, do, persever, counterfeit sad looks,
Make mouths upon me when I turn my back;
Wink each at other; hold the sweet jest up:
This sport, well carried, shall be chronicled.
If you have any pity, grace, or manners,
You would not make me such an argument.
But fare ye well: 'tis partly my own fault,
Which death or absence soon shall remedy.

LYSANDER Stay, gentle Helena; hear my excuse,
My love, my life, my soul, fair Helena!

HELENA O excellent!

HERMIA Sweet, do not scorn her so.

DEMETRIUS If she cannot entreat, I can compel.

LYSANDER Thou canst compel no more than she entreat:
Thy threats have no more strength than her weak prayers.
Helen, I love thee; by my life, I do.
I swear by that which I will lose for thee,
To prove him false that says I love thee not.

DEMETRIUS I say I love thee more than he can do.

LYSANDER If thou say so, withdraw, and prove it too.

DEMETRIUS Quick, come!

HERMIA Lysander, whereto tends all this?

LYSANDER Away, you Ethiope!

226–27 **Nymph:** Beautiful girl; **Celestial:** Heavenly.

237 **Ay, do, persever, counterfeit sad looks:** A paraphrase might read, 'Yes, continue your fake serious looks.'

248 **If she cannot entreat, I can compel:** If she cannot persuade him, I can force him.

249–50 **Thou canst compel … her weak prayers:** You can force me no more than she can persuade me. Your threats are no stronger than her weak requests ('prayers' here are requests to Lysander rather than to God).

257 **Ethiope:** Someone with a very dark complexion. Refer to **Text note** for lines 141–43.

DEMETRIUS No, no, Sir; he'll
Seem to break loose; take on as you would follow,
But yet come not. You are a tame man; go!
LYSANDER Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! Vile thing, let loose,
Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent!
HERMIA Why are you grown so rude? What change is this?
Sweet love –
LYSANDER Thy love! Out, tawny Tartar, out!
Out, loathèd med'cine! Hated potion, hence!
HERMIA Do you not jest?
HELENA Yes, sooth, and so do you.
LYSANDER Demetrius, I will keep my word with thee.
DEMETRIUS I would I had your bond, for I perceive
A weak bond holds you. I'll not trust your word.
LYSANDER What, should I hurt her, strike her, kill her dead?
Although I hate her, I'll not harm her so.
HERMIA What, can you do me greater harm than hate?
Hate me! Wherefore? O me! What news, my love!
Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander?
I am as fair now as I was erewhile.
Since night you loved me; yet since night you left me:
Why, then you left me (O, the gods forbid)
In earnest, shall I say?
LYSANDER Ay, by my life;
And never did desire to see thee more.
Therefore, be out of hope, of question, of doubt;
Be certain, nothing truer: 'tis no jest
That I do hate thee and love Helena.
HERMIA O me! You juggler! You canker-blossom!
You thief of love! What, have you come by night
And stolen my love's heart from him?
HELENA Fine, I'faith!
Have you no modesty, no maiden shame,
No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear

257–59 **No, no, Sir; he'll … You are a tame man; go:** Demetrius claims that Lysander is only pretending that he is being held back, that he, in fact, is a coward.

263 **Tawny Tartar:** 'Tawny' means dark. The 'Tartars' are an Asiatic people. Shakespeare is creating another image to suggest that Hermia has a dark complexion (remembering that fair hair and white, untanned skin was thought more beautiful than dark hair or a darker complexion in Shakespeare's time).

267–68 **I would I had … I'll not trust your word:** Demetrius is saying that he would like a guarantee because Lysander's word is not trustworthy. The statement 'I perceive / A weak bond holds you' is probably a reference to Lysander's breaking all his vows of love to Hermia, and also a reference to Hermia (as the weaker sex physically) still holding him back.

274 **Erewhile:** Before now.

Impatient answers from my gentle tongue?
Fie, fie! You counterfeit, you puppet, you!

HERMIA Puppet? Why so? Ay, that way goes the game.
Now I perceive that she hath made compare
Between our statures. She hath urged her height,
And with her personage, her tall personage,
Her height, forsooth, she hath prevailed with him.
And are you grown so high in his esteem,
Because I am so dwarfish and so low?
How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak:
How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

HELENA I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,
Let her not hurt me. I was never cursed:
I have no gift at all in shrewishness;
I am a right maid for my cowardice.
Let her not strike me. You perhaps may think,
Because she is something lower than myself,
That I can match her.

HERMIA Lower! Hark, again.

HELENA Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me.
I evermore did love you, Hermia,
Did ever keep your counsels, never wronged you,
Save that, in love unto Demetrius,
I told him of your stealth unto this wood.
He followed you; for love I followed him;
But he hath chid me hence and threatened me
To strike me, spurn me, nay, to kill me too.
And now, so you will let me quiet go,
To Athens will I bear my folly back,
And follow you no further. Let me go:
You see how simple and how fond I am.

HERMIA Why, get you gone; who is't that hinders you?

HELENA A foolish heart, that I leave here behind.

HERMIA What, with Lysander?

293 **Her height, forsooth, she hath prevailed with him:** It is clear from this passage that Hermia is shorter than Helena. Hermia thinks Helena's height has won Lysander over or caused him to fall in love with her.

296 **Painted maypole:** People used to dance around maypoles (tall, thin decorated poles) for May Day celebrations. 'Painted' suggests Helena is wearing too much make-up. Labelling someone a 'maypole' was a fairly standard insult for a tall person, much like calling a tall, skinny person a beanpole today.

301 **I have no gift at all in shrewishnness:** Helena is claiming that she is not a shrew, that she has not got a talent for fighting or insults.

317 **Fond:** Foolish.

HELENA With Demetrius.

LYSANDER Be not afraid; she shall not harm thee, Helena.

DEMETRIUS No, sir, she shall not, though you take her part.

HELENA O, when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd.
She was a vixen when she went to school,
And though she be but little, she is fierce.

HERMIA 'Little' again! Nothing but 'low' and 'little'!
Why will you suffer her to flout me thus?
Let me come to her.

LYSANDER Get you gone, you dwarf;
You minimus, of hindering knot-grass made;
You bead, you acorn.

DEMETRIUS You are too officious
In her behalf that scorns your services.
Let her alone. Speak not of Helena;
Take not her part; for, if thou dost intend
Never so little show of love to her,
Thou shalt aby it.

LYSANDER Now she holds me not.
Now follow, if thou darest, to try whose right,
Of thine or mine, is most in Helena.

DEMETRIUS Follow? Nay, I'll go with thee, cheek by jowl.

[LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS exit]

HERMIA You, mistress, all this coil is 'long of you.
Nay, go not back.

HELENA I will not trust you, I,
Nor longer stay in your cursed company.
Your hands than mine are quicker for a fray,
My legs are longer though, to run away.

[HELENA exits]

HERMIA I am amazed, and know not what to say.

[HERMIA exits]

324 **Vixen:** A female fox; a feisty or spiteful woman.

327 **Why will you suffer her to flout me thus:** Hermia is asking Lysander why he is allowing Helena to insult her ('suffer' = to allow or put up with).

329 **Minimus:** Tiny (that is, of minimum height); **Knot-grass:** A type of weed.

330–35 **You are too officious … Thou shalt aby it:** Demetrius is suggesting that Helena does not want Lysander's help. He warns Lysander to leave Helena alone and not to presume to defend her. Demetrius threatens that, even if Lysander shows a small amount of affection for Helena, he shall pay for it ('aby it'). 'Officious' here means meddlesome or interfering, not bossy and pompous.

338 **Cheek by jowl:** A 'jowl' is someone's jaw or cheek, thus this phrase means cheek to cheek, or side by side.

339 **You, mistress, all this coil is 'long of you:** Hermia blames Helena for everything that has happened ('coil' = fuss and bother; 'long of you' = on account of you).

QUESTIONS

1. What does Helena mean when she says 'O devilish-holy fray!' (line 129)? What literary device is she using here?
2. What do you think Helena means when she declares, 'Weigh oath with oath, and you will nothing weigh' (line 131)?
3. Construct and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of the ways in which Demetrius' language has changed as a result of being influenced by the love potion. Include brief quotes as evidence.

Demetrius' language earlier in the play	Demetrius' language upon waking to see Helena

4. In line 153, Helena uses the word 'superpraise' (possibly a word Shakespeare invented). Without looking it up in a dictionary, what do you think this word might mean?
5. Why do you think Helena feels that everyone is mocking her?
6. Why is Helena particularly offended by what she perceives to be Hermia's betrayal?
7. What poetic devices do Lysander and Demetrius use in insulting Hermia? Give two examples.
8. It is time once more to revisit your relationship diagram. Redraw the arrows in different colours to show who loves whom by the end of Act 3 Scene 2. Is everything back to normal yet? What relationships need mending?

EXTEND

1. Quote one of Lysander's statements that is in some way ironic, and explain how it is ironic.
2. Summarise in two or three sentences Hermia's speech upon entering this scene (lines 177–83). Why does the timing of this speech make it particularly ironic?
3. At this point in the play, both Lysander and Demetrius have been influenced by the love potion. Make a brief list of similarities in their use of language (especially the changes that have occurred) when under the potion's effect.

DISCUSS

We have already noticed that Demetrius' language changes in Act 3 Scene 2 under the influence of the love potion. As a director of this scene, what theatrical devices might you use to show that he has changed? Consider the way Demetrius speaks (what stage directions would you add?), his movement and actions, lighting (including colour), costume and even the soundtrack in your response. Discuss this in small groups and then spend some time sharing your ideas as a class.

Lysander riddles very prettily …

Shakespeare and the language of love

Shakespeare has always been considered a great love poet. When the theatres were closed down in the early 1590s due to the plague, Shakespeare spent his time writing the narrative love poem *Venus and Adonis*, which soon became a bestseller. He also wrote many romantic sonnets, which were concerned with the theme of love. Shakespeare employs particularly romantic language in some of these sonnets. For example, in Sonnet 18, probably the most famous lines in all of the sonnets:

> Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
> Thou art more lovely and more temperate …

Shakespeare was also sceptical about the excesses of this kind of language. Here are some lines from Sonnet 130:

> My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
> Coral is far more red than her lips' red.
> […]
> And in some perfumes is there more delight
> Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

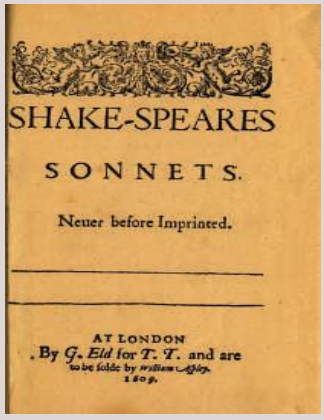
Despite these unflattering comparisons, Shakespeare concludes the sonnet on a positive note:

> And yet, by heav'n, I think my love as rare
> As any she belied with false compare.

(See Appendix 2 for the full text of these two sonnets.)

Almost all of Shakespeare's comedies are concerned primarily with the theme of romantic love (see box entitled 'The irrational nature of love' on pages 100–02). Many of Shakespeare's characters use similes and metaphors, hyperbole, classical allusions and rhyme to describe the one they love or the depth of their love. Often though, Shakespeare's characters at their most genuine will speak in unadorned blank verse or prose. Pay attention in Act 4 to the language the lovers use when they awake from their night in the woods.

There were dating manuals in Shakespeare's day, giving men advice on how to court or woo. It was common for


SHAKE-SPEARES
SONNETS.
Neuer before Imprinted.
AT LONDON
By G. Eld for T. T. and are
1609.

Front cover of the first published collection of Shakespeare's sonnets

an educated man to write a sonnet for his beloved or at least to know the right things to say. For this reason, girls had to be on their guard against suitors who sounded too slick. In *Romeo and Juliet* (Act 2 Scene 2), Juliet questions Romeo's poetic oaths:

ROMEO Lady, by yonder blessèd moon I swear
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops –
JULIET O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

This is also the case in Act 2 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Lysander wants to lie beside Hermia: she is immediately sceptical of the elaborate rhyming speech he makes, dismissing his argument with the phrase 'Lysander riddles very prettily'.

Act 3 Scene 2 (Part 3)

CHARACTERS

Puck
Oberon
Demetrius
Lysander
Helena
Hermia

IN A NUTSHELL

Furious at Puck's mistake, Oberon forces him to fix the situation. Puck obeys his command to create a deep fog so Lysander will grow confused and tired enough to fall asleep. Then Puck is to anoint Lysander's eyes a second time with the love juice, so that his love returns to Hermia. Oberon leaves to beg the changeling boy from Titania. Meanwhile, Puck puts Oberon's plan into action, taunting each of the men, pretending to be their rival suitor. Demetrius and Lysander become exhausted and they both lie down to sleep. Soon Helena and Hermia are also asleep.

Before you read

- Oberon's long speech (beginning line 10) has some complicated language. He tells Puck to hurry up (or 'hie'). He commands Puck to cover the sky (the 'starry welkin') soon ('anon') and asks that the fog be as black as 'Acheron' (a river running through the underworld). Remember that it is not important that you understand every word in every speech as long as you understand the gist of what is being said.

V

Negligence: Carelessness
Knaveries: Mischievous acts
Hie: Hurry up
Art: Are
Recreant: Coward
Hither: Here; to this place
Remedy: Cure or solution
Proverb: Short, well-known saying that expresses a truth

Another part of the wood.

OBERON This is thy negligence. Still thou mistak'st,
Or else committ'st thy knaveries wilfully.
PUCK Believe me, King of Shadows, I mistook:
Did not you tell me I should know the man
By the Athenian garments he had on?
And so far blameless proves my enterprise,
That I have 'nointed an Athenian's eyes.
And so far am I glad it so did sort
As this their jangling I esteem a sport.
OBERON Thou see'st these lovers seek a place to fight;
Hie, therefore, Robin: overcast the night.
The starry welkin cover thou anon
With drooping fog as black as Acheron,
And lead these testy rivals so astray
As one come not within another's way.
Like to Lysander, sometime frame thy tongue,
Then stir Demetrius up with bitter wrong;
And sometime rail thou like Demetrius;
And from each other look thou lead them thus,
Till o'er their brows death-counterfeiting sleep
With leaden legs and batty wings doth creep.
Then crush this herb into Lysander's eye;
Whose liquor hath this virtuous property,
To take from thence all error with his might,

345–46 **This is thy negligence … knaveries wilfully:** Oberon says that this situation has been caused by Puck's mistakes or purposeful ('wilful') acts of mischief ('knaveries').

356–65 **The starry welkin … batty wings doth creep:** Oberon orders Puck to create a fog so thick that even the stars cannot be seen. Puck is then to goad Demetrius and Lysander into a fight by imitating Demetrius to insult Lysander, and imitating Lysander to insult Demetrius. He plans to do this until they become tired and eventually lie down to sleep ('welkin' = sky; 'Acheron' = a river running through the underworld).

And make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight.
When they next wake, all this derision
Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision,
And back to Athens shall the lovers wend,
With league whose date till death shall never end.
Whiles I in this affair do thee employ,
I'll to my queen and beg her Indian boy;
And then I will her charmèd eye release
From monster's view, and all things shall be peace.

PUCK My Fairy Lord, this must be done with haste,
For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger,
At whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there,
Troop home to churchyards; damnèd spirits all,
That in crossways and floods have burial,
Already to their wormy beds are gone.
For fear lest day should look their shames upon,
They willfully themselves exile from light
And must for aye consort with black-browed night.

OBERON But we are spirits of another sort.
I, with the morning's love, have oft made sport,
And, like a forester, the groves may tread,
Even till the eastern gate, all fiery-red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessèd beams,
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.
But notwithstanding haste, make no delay:
We may effect this business yet ere day.

[OBERON exits]

PUCK Up and down, up and down,
I will lead them up and down.

369 **Wonted sight:** Accustomed or usual sight (the way Lysander saw things before he was affected by the love juice).

372 **Wend:** Make their way.

373 **With league whose date till death shall never end:** The lovers' friendship or love will last throughout their lives ('league' = friendship or love).

377 **From monster's view:** The 'monster' he refers to is Bottom.

379–84 **For night's swift dragons … wormy beds are gone:** Puck recommends hurrying because the night is passing swiftly (the dragons pulling the chariot of night are also a visual image for the clouds) and dawn is approaching. The morning star indicates it is time that ghosts and 'damnèd spirits' return to their graves and churchyards ('Aurora's harbinger' = the morning star seen shortly before the dawn).

388–93 **But we are spirits … salt green streams:** Oberon contrasts himself and Puck with the 'ghosts' and 'damnèd spirits' that Puck discusses. Oberon says he is often enjoying himself in the woods when the sun rises and turns the green streams to gold (here, a 'forester' is a guardian of the forest).

I am feared in field and town.
Goblin, lead them up and down.
Here comes one.

[LYSANDER re-enters]

LYSANDER Where art thou, proud Demetrius? Speak thou now.
PUCK Here, villain, drawn and ready. Where art thou?
LYSANDER I will be with thee straight.
PUCK Follow me, then,
To plainer ground.

[LYSANDER exits, following the voice; DEMETRIUS re-enters]

DEMETRIUS Lysander! Speak again.
Thou runaway, thou coward! Art thou fled?
Speak! In some bush? Where dost thou hide thy head?
PUCK Thou coward! Art thou bragging to the stars,
Telling the bushes that thou look'st for wars,
And wilt not come? Come, recreant; come, thou child;
I'll whip thee with a rod. He is defiled
That draws a sword on thee.
DEMETRIUS Yea, art thou there?
PUCK Follow my voice. We'll try no manhood here.

[Both exit; LYSANDER re-enters]

LYSANDER He goes before me and still dares me on;
When I come where he calls, then he is gone.
The villain is much lighter-heeled than I:
I followed fast, but faster he did fly;
That fallen am I in dark uneven way,
And here will rest me.

[LYSANDER lies down]

Come, thou gentle day!
For if but once thou show me thy grey light,
I'll find Demetrius and revenge this spite.

[LYSANDER sleeps; PUCK and DEMETRIUS re-enter]

PUCK Ho, ho, ho, coward! Why comest thou not?
DEMETRIUS Abide me, if thou darest; for well I wot
Thou runn'st before me, shifting every place,
And darest not stand, nor look me in the face.
Where art thou now?

410–11 **He is defiled / That draws a sword on thee:** Puck is suggesting (in Lysander's voice) that to fight with Demetrius is somehow beneath him ('defiled' = tainted or stained). He says this to Demetrius to provoke him.

422 **Abide me:** Stay with me, or stay and fight me if you dare.

PUCK Come hither; I am here.

DEMETRIUS Nay, then, thou mock'st me. Thou shalt buy this dear,
If ever I thy face by daylight see.
Now, go thy way! Faintness constraineth me
To measure out my length on this cold bed.
By day's approach look to be visited.

[DEMETRIUS lies down and sleeps; HELENA re-enters]

HELENA O weary night, O long and tedious night,
Abate thy hours. Shine comforts from the east,
That I may back to Athens by daylight,
From these that my poor company detest;
And sleep, that sometimes shuts up sorrow's eye,
Steal me awhile from mine own company.

[HELENA lies down and sleeps]

PUCK Yet but three? Come one more;
Two of both kinds make up four.
Here she comes, curst and sad;
Cupid is a knavish lad,
Thus to make poor females mad.

[HERMIA re-enters]

HERMIA Never so weary, never so in woe;
Bedabbled with the dew and torn with briers,
I can no further crawl, no further go;
My legs can keep no pace with my desires.
Here will I rest me till the break of day.
Heavens shield Lysander, if they mean a fray!

[HERMIA lies down and sleeps]

PUCK On the ground
Sleep sound.
I'll apply
To your eye,
Gentle lover, remedy.

[PUCK squeezes the juice on LYSANDER's eyes]

When thou wak'st,
Thou takest
True delight
In the sight
Of thy former lady's eye.

432 **Abate thy hours:** Cut short your hours.

And the country proverb known,
  That every man should take his own,
In your waking shall be shown:
Jack shall have Jill;
  Nought shall go ill;
The man shall have his mare again,
And all shall be well.

[PUCK exits]

463 **The man shall have his mare again:** Another proverb to tell the audience 'all shall be well' or end happily.

QUESTIONS

1 Oberon accuses Puck of 'commit[ing his] knaveries wilfully'. What does he mean by this?
2 What positive qualities does Oberon seem to possess in this scene?
3 Do you think Puck enjoys insulting Demetrius and Lysander? Find some evidence from this scene in support of your answer.

EXTEND

1 Oberon goes to great lengths to describe the blackness of the fog that he wishes Puck to create. Why do you think Shakespeare has Oberon give such a long description for the audience?
2 Puck's speech at the end of this scene sounds like a nursery rhyme (lines 448–64). Why is this appropriate here?

DISCUSS

1 As a director of this scene, in a modern production, what devices or technologies might you use to produce the dark fog that Oberon asks Puck to create? As well as lighting techniques, consider other ways you could generate this effect.
2 Would you cut down or edit Oberon's instructions to Puck for your audience? Why or why not?

The irrational nature of love

Psychologist Sigmund Freud is reported to have said, 'You are always insane when you are in love'. Shakespeare certainly draws our attention to the idea of love's irrational nature in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This major theme can be seen in the multiple plots of the play, the illogical arguments of those in love, and the repetition of key words.

The numerous storylines that make up the world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* all explore various conflicts associated with love: between male and female, old and young, duty and desire, and especially between reason (rational thinking) and love itself. The play opens with Theseus barely able to wait the four days until he marries Hippolyta (oddly, as he has just defeated her in battle). Additionally, two young noblemen, Lysander and Demetrius, are in love with Hermia; and Oberon, the King of the Fairies, is jealous of his wife's love for an adopted human boy.

The irrational nature of love is seen clearly when Lysander and Demetrius, under the influence of the fairies' love potion, try to justify logically how they change from loving Hermia to 'doting' on Helena:

Demetrius	Lysander
The play begins with Demetrius insisting to Helena, 'I love thee not … For I am sick when I do look on thee' (Act 2 Scene 1, lines 188 and 212).	Similarly, Lysander only has 'eyes' for Hermia.
Yet, by Act 3 Scene 2, under the effect of the love potion, Demetrius awakes to declare, 'O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!' (line 137).	Lysander, also under the love potion's spell, awakes to see Helena and declares, 'Not Hermia, but Helena I love' (Act 2 Scene 2, line 113), and that he will 'run through fire' for her (Act 2 Scene 2, line 103).
In this love-struck state, Demetrius claims to 'hate Hermia' (Act 3 Scene 2, lines 280–81).	Likewise, Lysander claims that Hermia brings 'the deepest loathing to the stomach' (Act 2 Scene 2, line 138), and that she is nothing but a 'cat … a burr … a vile thing' (Act 3 Scene 2, line 260).

Shakespeare has both Lysander and Demetrius ludicrously trying to defend their changing affections with logical argument. Lysander tries to sound especially convincing to Helena: 'The will of man is by his reason swayed, / And reason says you are the worthier maid' (Act 2 Scene 2, lines 115–16). This is one of the clearest instances of dramatic irony in the play. We, the audience, knowing that the lovers' changed affections stem from the fairies' love potion, can laugh at their absurd logic. Little wonder Puck says, 'Lord, what fools these mortals be' (Act 3 Scene 2, line 115).

The most bizarre example of the irrational nature of love is when Titania falls in love with the donkey-headed Bottom. Again, under the influence of the love potion, Titania says dotingly: 'So is mine eye enthrallèd to thy shape … [I] swear, I love thee' (Act 3 Scene 1, lines 108, 110). Interestingly, it is the foolish clown, Bottom, who responds by delivering perhaps the most rational lines in the play on the nature of love: 'to / Say the truth, reason and love keep little company together now-a-days' (lines 111–12).

Another way that Shakespeare reinforces the theme of the irrational nature of love is by frequently associating love with two other sets of words.

1 Eye / eyes

The words 'eye', 'eyes', 'see', 'seeing' and 'blind' repeatedly occur in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in association not with rational thinking, but with ridiculous extremes or 'doting'.

- Demetrius is first of all 'doting on Hermia's eyes' (Act 1 Scene 1, line 230), but in Act 4 Scene 1 claims, 'the object and pleasure of mine eye / Is only Helena' (lines 165–66).
- Likewise, Lysander claims of Helena: 'Reason becomes the marshal to my will / And leads me to your eyes' (Act 2 Scene 2, lines 120–21).
- It is no accident that the love potion is applied to the victims' eyelids, causing them to 'madly dote' or 'dote in extremity' on the first creature they see (Act 2 Scene 1, line 72; Act 3 Scene 2, line 72).

Q What warning does Helena give about love in Act 1 Scene 1, line 234?

2 True / truth

The word 'love' is also frequently juxtaposed with (placed alongside) words such as 'true', 'truth' and 'truly', as well as their opposites, such as 'lie', 'feigning' and 'false'.

- For example, Lysander wisely proclaims to Hermia, 'The course of true love never did run smooth' (Act 1 Scene 1, line 134). But later, under the influence of the love potion when he 'hates' Hermia, he claims to speak 'truly' of his love for Helena (Act 4 Scene 1, line 144) and dares anyone to 'prove him false that says I love [her] not' (Act 3 Scene 2, line 253).
- Similarly, Demetrius initially tells Helena, 'in plainest truth … I do not … love you' (Act 2 Scene 1, lines 200–01), but later confesses, 'Be certain, nothing truer: I … love Helena' (Act 3 Scene 2, lines 280–81), and swears that his love for Helena will 'evermore be true' (Act 4 Scene 1, line 171).

Q In the final scene (Act 5 Scene 1, lines 4–20), Theseus compares the young lovers to madmen and poets, claiming that they all see things that are not true. What do you think he means by this?

A Midsummer Night's Dream humorously reminds us of the irrational nature of love. However, Shakespeare's comedies also celebrate the theme of romantic love. In Act 5, when all the characters meet together in Theseus' palace to celebrate a triple wedding, Hippolyta will draw our attention to the notion that love, 'strange' and illogical though it might be, is also 'admirable' (Scene 1, line 27). Love may indeed be blind, but Shakespeare also shows it to be 'something of great constancy' (Act 5 Scene 1, line 26), a universal experience that is both wonderful and absurd.

Act 4

Act 4 Scene 1 (Part 1)

CHARACTERS

Oberon
Titania
Bottom
Puck
Mustardseed
Peaseblossom
Cobweb
Moth *(non-speaking role)*

IN A NUTSHELL

Oberon observes Bottom being served by fairies and adored by Titania, who is still under the spell of the love potion. While Bottom and Titania sleep, Puck arrives and Oberon tells him that Titania has agreed to give him (Oberon) the changeling boy. Oberon releases Titania from the influence of the love potion. After Puck restores Bottom to his former state, the reconciled fairy couple dance among the sleeping lovers, before setting off to bless Theseus' house.

Before you read

- Think about how you would play the part of Bottom; you would probably enjoy yourself quite a lot. You could deliver his lines with nonchalance, like a king or a prince confident in his position. Or perhaps you might deliver the lines some other way.
- Titania's use of language changes once Oberon releases her from the effects of the love potion. Such a transformation should arguably affect how an actor will deliver her lines. Bear this in mind if you are reading the part of Titania.

V

Amiable:	Loving or tender (today this word means personable or friendly)
Mounsieur:	Variation of the French word for Mister (Mr), spelt Monsieur today
Dotage:	State of being in love; infatuation
Upbraid:	Scold or criticise
Vexation:	Emotional turmoil; extreme worry
Enamoured:	In love (with)
Visage:	Face
Amity:	Friendship

The wood. Lysander, Demetrius, Helena and Hermia are asleep.

[TITANIA and BOTTOM enter, attended by PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH, MUSTARDSEED and other FAIRIES; OBERON is hiding behind them, unseen]

TITANIA Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed,
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,
And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,
And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.

BOTTOM Where's Peaseblossom?

PEASEBLOSSOM Ready.

BOTTOM Scratch my head, Peaseblossom. Where's Mounsieur Cobweb?

COBWEB Ready.

BOTTOM Mounsieur Cobweb, good mounsieur, get you your weapons in your hand, and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle; and, good mounsieur, bring me the honey-bag. Do not fret yourself too much in the action, mounsieur; and, good mounsieur, have a care the honey-bag break not: I would be loath to have you over-flown with a honey-bag, signior. Where's Mounsieur Mustardseed?

MUSTARDSEED Ready.

BOTTOM Give me your neaf, Mounsieur Mustardseed. Pray you, leave your courtesy, good mounsieur.

MUSTARDSEED What's your will?

BOTTOM Nothing, good mounsieur, but to help Cavalery Cobweb to scratch. I must to the barber's, mounsieur, for methinks I am marvellous hairy about the face. And I am such a tender ass: if my hair do but tickle me, I must scratch.

TITANIA What, wilt thou hear some music, my sweet love?

BOTTOM I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let's have the tongs and the bones.

[Music plays]

TITANIA Or say, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat.

BOTTOM Truly, a peck of provender; I could munch your good dry oats. Methinks I have a great desire to a bottle of hay. Good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow.

13–14 **I would be loath … with a honey-bag:** I would not want to see you covered with honey.

16 **Neaf:** Fist.

20 **Marvellous:** Very.

24–25 **The tongs and the bones:** Simple instruments like castanets and clappers. What Bottom has in mind here is far less sophisticated than the sort of music Titania's fairies can offer.

27–28 **A peck of provender … bottle of hay:** A peck is a unit of measurement equivalent to about nine litres; Bottom desires some fodder (food for animals) and a bundle ('bottle') of hay.

29 **Fellow:** Equal.

TITANIA I have a venturous fairy that shall seek
The squirrel's hoard, and fetch thee new nuts.
BOTTOM I had rather have a handful or two of dried peas. But, I pray you, let none of your people stir me: I have an exposition of sleep come upon me.
TITANIA Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms.
Fairies, begone, and be all ways away.

[FAIRIES exit]

So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle
Gently entwist; the female ivy so
Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.
O, how I love thee! How I dote on thee!

[They lie down to sleep, as PUCK enters and OBERON advances from hiding]

OBERON Welcome, good Robin. See'st thou this sweet sight?
Her dotage now I do begin to pity,
For, meeting her of late behind the wood,
Seeking sweet favours from this hateful fool,
I did upbraid her and fall out with her:
For she his hairy temples then had rounded
With a coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers.
And that same dew, which sometime on the buds
Was wont to swell like round and orient pearls,
Stood now within the pretty flowerets' eyes
Like tears that did their own disgrace bewail.
When I had at my pleasure taunted her
And she in mild terms begged my patience,
I then did ask of her her changeling child,
Which straight she gave me, and her fairy sent
To bear him to my bower in fairy land.
And now I have the boy, I will undo
This hateful imperfection of her eyes.
And, gentle Puck, take this transformèd scalp
From off the head of this Athenian swain,
That, he awaking when the other do,
May all to Athens back again repair
And think no more of this night's accidents

30 **Venturous:** Adventurous.

33 **Exposition:** Malapropism for disposition (desire or inclination); exposition means explanation.

48–51 **And that same dew … their own disgrace bewail:** Oberon is stating that the flowers seem to be crying at the disgrace of the whole incident. This is another example of the natural world being affected by Oberon and Titania's actions and emotions.

60 **Swain:** Yokel; rough or common person.

But as the fierce vexation of a dream.
But first I will release the Fairy Queen:
Be as thou wast wont to be;
See as thou wast wont to see.
Dian's bud o'er Cupid's flower
Hath such force and blessèd power.
Now, my Titania, wake you, my sweet Queen.

TITANIA My Oberon! What visions have I seen!
Methought I was enamoured of an ass.

OBERON There lies your love.

TITANIA How came these things to pass?
O, how mine eyes do loathe his visage now!

OBERON Silence awhile – Robin, take off this head –
Titania, music call; and strike more dead
Than common sleep of all these five the sense.

TITANIA Music, ho! Music, such as charmeth sleep!

PUCK Now, when thou wak'st, with thine own fool's eyes peep.

OBERON Sound, music! *[Music plays]* Come, my Queen; take hands with me,
And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be.
Now thou and I are new in amity,
And will tomorrow midnight solemnly
Dance in Duke Theseus' house triumphantly,
And bless it to all fair prosperity.
There shall the pairs of faithful lovers be
Wedded, with Theseus, all in jollity.

PUCK Fairy King, attend, and mark:
I do hear the morning lark.

OBERON Then, my Queen, in silence sad,
Trip we after night's shade;
We the globe can compass soon,
Swifter than the wand'ring moon.

64 **But as the fierce vexation of a dream:** Bottom will remember these events as a vivid, emotionally charged dream.

68–69 **Dian's bud o'er … and blessèd power:** Oberon is saying that he will use Dian's bud to reverse the power of the love potion – Cupid's flower. Dian or Diana was the ancient Roman goddess associated with chastity. The assumption here seems to be that her chaste power will counteract the effects of excessive dotage.

76–77 **And strike more dead … five the sense:** The sleep will be very deep, appearing almost like death (killing the senses).

83 **Solemnly:** Ceremoniously or as a joyful celebration, in keeping with a wedding ceremony.

85 **Prosperity:** Wealth.

92–93 **We the globe … wand'ring moon:** Oberon is saying that they will circle ('compass') the Earth ('globe') more quickly than the moon's orbit. Remember, in Act 1, Puck could circle the earth in 40 minutes.

TITANIA Come, my lord, and in our flight
Tell me how it came this night
That I sleeping here was found
With these mortals on the ground. 95

[All exit]

97 **Mortals:** Humans.

QUESTIONS

1 Do you think Bottom enjoys his new situation? Give some evidence to support your opinion.
2 What do you think the fairies' attitude towards Bottom might be?
3 List some of the words Titania uses that emphasise her love for Bottom.
4 Why is Oberon happy to reconcile (or make up) with Titania?
5 How does Oberon seem to react to Titania's infatuation with Bottom? What can we tell about his personality from this?
6 After Oberon releases Titania from the influence of the love potion, what is her attitude towards Oberon? Quote some evidence from the scene to support your answer.
7 Titania asks Oberon to tell her the full story of what happened. Why do you think Shakespeare excludes (or leaves out) Oberon's reply?

EXTEND

1 Create and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of some of the differences (or areas of conflict) between Bottom and the Fairy Kingdom.

Area of difference	Bottom's details	Fairies' details	How does Shakespeare use these differences to create comedy? *Write about one paragraph*
Food			
Music			
Language			
Other aspects?			

2 Do you think Shakespeare is suggesting that the relationship between Titania and Bottom is sexual? Give evidence for your answer. Should the director of the play make this clear or should it be left ambiguous?
3 What seems to be Oberon's attitude towards Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding? Give evidence for your answer.

4 Why do you think Oberon asks Puck to remove the ass's head *only after* Titania has seen Bottom in this state? What does this detail add to our understanding of Oberon's personality?

5 Shakespeare signals Titania's transformation to her former state by subtle changes in her language. See if you can describe two or three changes in her language after she wakes up.

6 Explain how Oberon uses a pun when he says to Titania, 'There lies your love' (line 73). Hint: he is referring both to Bottom, who is still asleep, and to the nature of love itself.

7 In his speech beginning 'Sound, music …' (line 80), what positive words does Oberon use to suggest that he and Titania are happily reconciled?

Wedded, with Theseus, with all jollity …

A Midsummer Night's Dream as comedy

Shakespeare's plays were first collected and published in 1623, in what we now call the First Folio; this was a thick book entitled *Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was included in the section marked *Comedies*, along with such famous plays as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. The book did not offer a definition of comedy, so what did the editors mean by comedy?

While the term tragedy suggests there will be a sorrowful or disastrous conclusion, comedy implies a happy ending. For example, the medieval Italian poet, Dante, wrote *The Divine Comedy* in the thirteenth century. The poem was written in three parts, following the pilgrim, Dante, through hell, purgatory and heaven. Despite the graphic torments of hell, the poem is a comedy because it concludes in heaven, with the transformed Dante glimpsing the face of God.

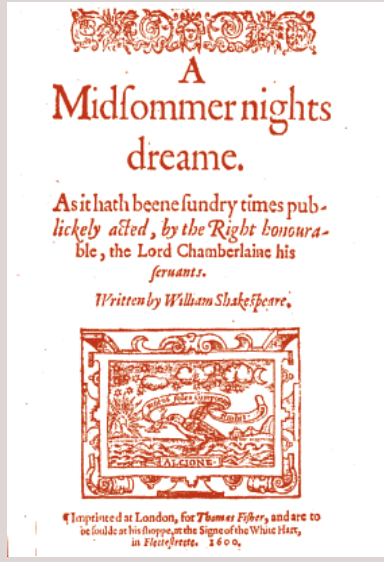
The earliest comedies that we know of were performed in ancient Greece. These plays often included the sort of bawdy (rude) joking that we find in Shakespeare's plays. They are often harsh and satirical as well, mocking important people and institutions.

While Shakespeare's plays frequently celebrate love and ridicule lovers, some of his comedies also present political concerns. *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, invites the audience to sympathise with a Jewish character who suffers persecution at the hands of a racist society. Similarly, *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* offers, in part, a critique of the power that fathers had over their children in Elizabethan society.

Shakespeare's comedies can also deal with adversity and difficult circumstances. *As You Like It* begins with the wicked Fredrick stealing the kingdom from his brother, Duke

Senior, who is then forced to live in exile in the forest; *Twelfth Night* begins with a shipwreck that separates brother and sister, Sebastian and Viola. Despite various trials, comedies end happily; in the case of Shakespeare, usually with the wedding of two or more couples. The story of *As You Like It* has a fairytale ending, with the wedding of four couples, as well as the news that Duke Fredrick has undergone a religious conversion and will, therefore, return the kingdom to Duke Senior. *Twelfth Night* concludes with three weddings, and Sebastian and Viola reunited.

During his career, Shakespeare wrote more comedies than tragedies. The period 1599–1607 saw some of his darkest writing, but his later plays (sometimes called romances) generally have happy endings.


A
Midſommer nights
dreame.
As it hath beene ſundry times pub-
lickely acted, by the Right honoura-
ble, the Lord Chamberlaine his
ſeruants.
Written by William Shakeſpeare.
Imprinted at London, for Thomas Fiſher, and are to
be ſolde at his ſhoppe, at the Signe of the White Hart,
in Fleetſtreete. 1600.

Title page of the first published version of A Midsummer Night's Dream, *now known as the First Quarto*

You have probably already worked out that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a comedy. Can you guess the number of weddings that will take place at the end of the play?

Act 4 Scene 1 (Part 2)

CHARACTERS

Theseus
Demetrius
Bottom
Egeus
Lysander
Hippolyta
Helena
Hermia

IN A NUTSHELL

Theseus and Hippolyta are out hunting with Egeus and their attendants when they discover the pairs of lovers asleep. Lysander begins to explain his and Hermia's planned escape but is interrupted by Egeus, who demands Lysander be put to death. Demetrius explains his new love for Helena, and Theseus proposes that the two couples join Hippolyta and him in a triple wedding later that day. After everyone has left, Bottom awakes, thinking he has had a fantastic dream. He decides to ask Peter Quince to write a ballad of his dream for him to sing towards the end of their play.

Before you read

- The first 24 lines of this scene include some of the most challenging language in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Theseus, out hunting with Hippolyta, is boasting about the quality of his hounds and the music they make. Hippolyta recalls a time when she was in Crete and heard the music of hounds. These lines are not particularly important for your understanding of the play as a whole and you should not worry too much about the meaning of unfamiliar or difficult words in these lines.

V

Forester: The keeper of the forest
Conjunction: Together
Solemnity: Ceremony or celebration
Concord: Agreement; also relates to harmony or a pleasant sound
Enmity: Hostility; hatred
Hither: To this place; here
Discourse: Discussion, conversation or story (when used as a noun)
Wit: Intelligence

The wood.

[Wind horns sound from within; then THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS and their train enter]

THESEUS
Go, one of you, find out the forester,
For now our observation is performed;
And since we have the vaward of the day,
My love shall hear the music of my hounds.
Uncouple in the western valley; let them go.
Dispatch, I say, and find the forester.

[An Attendant exits]

We will, fair Queen, up to the mountain's top,
And mark the musical confusion
Of hounds and echo in conjunction.

98–103 **Go, one of you … and find the forester:** Theseus orders his men to find the keeper of the forest (the 'forester'). The group has performed ('observed') the May Day rites and it is still the earliest part of the day (the 'vaward' of the day). He orders his men to release ('uncouple') his hounds so Hippolyta can hear their music.

105–06 **And mark the musical … in conjunction:** They will listen to the sound of barking and its echoes.

HIPPOLYTA I was with Hercules and Cadmus once,
When in a wood of Crete they bayed the bear
With hounds of Sparta. Never did I hear
Such gallant chiding; for, besides the groves,
The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seemed all one mutual cry: I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.
THESEUS My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind,
So flewed, so sanded, and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew;
Crook-kneed, and dew-lapped like Thessalian bulls;
Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells,
Each under each. A cry more tuneable
Was never helloed to, nor cheered with horn,
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly.
Judge when you hear. But, soft! What nymphs are these?
EGEUS My lord, this is my daughter here asleep;
And this, Lysander; this Demetrius is;
This Helena, old Nedar's Helena.
I wonder of their being here together.
THESEUS No doubt they rose up early to observe
The rite of May, and hearing our intent,
Came here in grace of our solemnity.
But speak, Egeus; is not this the day
That Hermia should give answer of her choice?
EGEUS It is, my lord.
THESEUS Go, bid the huntsmen wake them with their horns.

[Horns and shouting come from within. LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA and HERMIA awake, startled]

107–13 **I was with Hercules … such sweet thunder:** These lines remind us that Hippolyta is a character from Greek mythology. Hippolyta tells the story of her being in Crete with the Greek hero Hercules, and with Cadmus, the founder of the city of Thebes, observing Spartan hounds hunting a bear. Hippolyta describes their musical discord – the barking was not harmonious, but the sound it produced was as sweet as music. Sparta was an ancient Greek city-state famous for its warriors.

114–15 **My hounds are bred … so flewed, so sanded:** Theseus is saying that his hounds are of the same breed, having the same large hanging cheeks and being sandy-brown in colour.

117 **Crook-kneed, and dew-lapped like Thessalian bulls:** The hounds have bent knees and loose folds of skin hanging about their necks like bulls from Thessaly. Thessaly was in the north of ancient Greece.

122 **But, soft! What nymphs are these:** But, wait a minute! What are these pretty girls doing here? Presumably, Theseus has only seen the women.

128–29 **The rite of May … of our solemnity:** Theseus assumes the couples have risen early to celebrate May Day and greet the hunting party in their ceremony.

Good morrow, friends. Saint Valentine is past;
Begin these wood-birds but to couple now?

LYSANDER Pardon, my lord.

THESEUS I pray you all, stand up.
I know you two are rival enemies:
How comes this gentle concord in the world,
That hatred is so far from jealousy,
To sleep by hate, and fear no enmity?

LYSANDER My lord, I shall reply amazedly,
Half sleep, half waking. But as yet, I swear,
I cannot truly say how I came here;
But, as I think (for truly would I speak),
And now do I bethink me, so it is:
I came with Hermia hither; our intent
Was to be gone from Athens, where we might,
Without the peril of the Athenian law –

EGEUS Enough, enough, my lord; you have enough.
I beg the law, the law, upon his head.
They would have stol'n away; they would, Demetrius,
Thereby to have defeated you and me,
You of your wife and me of my consent,
Of my consent that she should be your wife.

DEMETRIUS My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth,
Of this their purpose hither to this wood;
And I in fury hither followed them,
Fair Helena in fancy following me.
But, my good lord, I wot not by what power
(But by some power it is), my love to Hermia,
Melted as the snow, seems to me now
As the remembrance of an idle gaud,
Which in my childhood I did dote upon;
And all the faith, the virtue of my heart,
The object and the pleasure of mine eye,
Is only Helena. To her, my lord,
Was I betrothed ere I saw Hermia;
But, like in sickness, did I loathe this food;
But, as in health, come to my natural taste,
Now I do wish it, love it, long for it,
And will for evermore be true to it.

THESEUS Fair lovers, you are fortunately met.
Of this discourse we more will hear anon.

134–35 **Saint Valentine is … but to couple now:** A paraphrase might read, 'St Valentine's Day is past and these lovebirds seem to be pairing up now.' It was believed that birds chose their mates on St Valentine's Day.

162 **An idle gaud:** A worthless toy.

Egeus, I will overbear your will,
For in the temple by and by with us
These couples shall eternally be knit.
And, for the morning now is something worn,
Our purposed hunting shall be set aside.
Away with us to Athens; three and three,
We'll hold a feast in great solemnity.
Come, Hippolyta.

[THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS and their train exit]

DEMETRIUS These things seem small and undistinguishable,
Like far-off mountains turnèd into clouds.

HERMIA Methinks I see these things with parted eye,
When everything seems double.

HELENA So methinks:
And I have found Demetrius like a jewel,
Mine own, and not mine own.

DEMETRIUS Are you sure
That we are awake? It seems to me
That yet we sleep, we dream. Do not you think
The Duke was here, and bid us follow him?

HERMIA Yea, and my father.

HELENA And Hippolyta.

LYSANDER And he did bid us follow to the temple.

DEMETRIUS Why, then, we are awake. Let's follow him,
And by the way let us recount our dreams.

[All exit]

BOTTOM *[Awaking]* 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, stol'n 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 patchèd 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

174 **I will overbear your will:** I will overrule your wishes or desires.

202 **Patchèd fool:** A clown-like fool.

202–05 **The eye of man hath not heard … what my dream was:** Bottom humorously butchers a quotation from St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians 2:9: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him'. Besides his misquotation, Shakespeare also adds to the comical effect by mixing up descriptions of the senses, such as when Bottom says, 'man's hand is not able to taste'. This technique is known as synaesthesia.

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.

[BOTTOM exits]

207–08 **Peradventure:** Perhaps.

QUESTIONS

1 What is Theseus' attitude towards his hounds?

2 What does Egeus want Theseus to do about Lysander and Hermia's escape?

3 Create and complete a table like the one below to show your understanding of how Demetrius' feelings for Helena have changed. Include quotes and line numbers in your response.

To what does Demetrius compare his feelings for Helena before he loved her?	To what does Demetrius compare his feelings for Helena now that he loves her?	Poetic device(s) Demetrius uses to make these comparisons

4 Why do you think Theseus contradicts the law of Athens by allowing Lysander and Hermia to marry?

5 When Helena compares Demetrius' new love for her to finding a 'jewel' (line 186), what poetic device is she using?

6 How do we know Bottom is restored to his former state? Give at least two pieces of evidence.

7 How does Bottom intend to use his dream for the Duke's entertainment?

8 For the final time, redraw the arrows on your relationship diagram (see page 35), showing who loves whom by the end of Act 4 Scene 1. To what extent has Shakespeare chosen to restore everything to the way it was at the beginning of the play?

EXTEND

1 What is the tone of this scene up until line 122? Can you find any evidence that Theseus and Hippolyta are getting on well now?

2 Read Lysander's speech beginning 'My Lord, I shall reply …' (lines 141–48), as well as Bottom's speech upon waking up (lines 195–208). Draw and complete a table like the one on the following page to highlight the various language features that Shakespeare uses to show Lysander and Bottom's confusion.

Lysander (lines 141–48)		Bottom (lines 195–208)	
Language features that show Lysander's confusion	*Examples or quotes from the text*	Language features that show Bottom's confusion	*Examples or quotes from the text*

3 How is the title *Bottom's Dream* comical?

4 Is Bottom's attitude to waking from his 'dream' one of disappointment, or revelation, or something else? Give evidence to support your opinion.

5 Now that Oberon and Puck have, to some extent, restored the young lovers, note that the couples' language loses its hyperbolic exaggeration, and they return to speaking in blank verse rather than rhyming couplets. The young lovers now explain their love for each other using simple images, rather than complicated and descriptive metaphors. What images of love and affection do the couples use in the following lines?

- **a** 165–71 (Demetrius)
- **b** 182–83 (Demetrius)
- **c** 184–85 (Hermia)
- **d** 185–87 (Helena)

Michael Hoffman: DVD Chapter 18 (The lovers awake)

1 What seems to be Hippolyta's attitude to Theseus at the beginning of this scene? How does Hoffman make this clear in her actions and speech?

2 To what extent is this consistent with Shakespeare's portrayal of Theseus and Hippolyta in this scene?

3 What cinematic elements make this scene joyful and romantic? In your response, discuss aspects such as light (including colour), music and costume (or lack thereof).

4 Why do you think Hoffman chooses to have Theseus consult Hippolyta before making his decision to ask the couples to share their marriage ceremony? What element is this reinforcing in (or perhaps adding to) Hippolyta's character?

5 How does the actor playing Egeus convey a feeling of anger? Discuss his voice and facial expressions.

DISCUSS

In Extend Question 2, you examined Bottom's confusion upon waking, which Shakespeare highlights by means of various language devices. As a director of this scene, what theatrical devices would you use to help a modern audience comprehend Bottom's confusion visually? Consider the way he speaks (what stage directions would you add?), his movement and actions, lighting (including colour), costume and even the soundtrack in your response. Discuss this in small groups and then spend some time sharing your ideas as a class.

A word about malapropisms

In the Australian comedy *Kath and Kim*, the characters often use the wrong words to communicate what they wish to say. In one episode, instead of saying, 'I want to be *affluent*, Mum', Kim says, 'I want to be *effluent*.' Affluent means rich, while effluent means sewage or industrial waste. The result of replacing a similar-sounding word that means something completely different can be humorous and is known as a **malapropism**.

The term malapropism comes from the name Mrs Malaprop, a character in Richard Sheridan's humorous play *The Rivals* (1775). In this play, Mrs Malaprop says things like: 'He is the very *pineapple* [she meant 'pinnacle'] of politeness.' Shakespeare's characters were using malapropisms many years before they were given this name. Perhaps the best known example is Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing*.

In the earlier scenes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the tradesmen/actors (or mechanicals) often use malapropisms. Take the following example from Peter Quince: 'and say he comes to *disfigure*, or to present, the person of Moonshine' (Act 3 Scene 1, line 43). Here Quince intends to say 'figure', which means to represent, rather than 'disfigure', which is to make something look ugly. Of course, their bad acting will be 'disfiguring' the play. The audience understands this in a way Quince does not and it could, therefore, be fair to say that Quince's malapropism creates humour through dramatic irony. The effect is similar earlier in this scene when Bottom talks of using 'words to the same *defect*', when he clearly means '*effect*'.

More on imagery: eyes

In our introduction to imagery (pages 57–58), we noted that Shakespeare links the numerous plot lines, groups of characters and ideas through his abundant use of imagery. In addition to images relating to the moon, no doubt you have noticed by now that Shakespeare makes repeated reference to eyes.

1 Descriptions of characters' eyes

- Shakespeare's characters, in and out of love, frequently focus on each others' eyes, which are presented as windows to the soul or inner reality.
- In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, lovers' eyes are described as 'tempests' (Act 1 Scene 1, line 131), 'lode-stars' (Act 1 Scene 1, line 183), 'spheres' (Act 2 Scene 2, line 99), and 'blessed and attractive' (Act 2 Scene 2, line 92).
- Perhaps the most poetic allusion to eyes in the play is when Demetrius, doting on Helena, declares: 'To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne? / Crystal is muddy' (Act 3 Scene 2, lines 138–39). Such highly descriptive comparisons are typical of Elizabethan romantic poetry, which Shakespeare gently mocks in his famous Sonnet 130, in which he claims: 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; / Coral is far more red than her lips' red' (see Appendix 2, page 155).

Q How are the characters' eyes affected by the fairies' love potion (see Act 2 Scene 1, lines 170–72; Act 3 Scene 2, lines 1–3)?

2 Ways of seeing

- As well as descriptions referring to actual eyes, there are many figurative references to eyes, associated with ways of seeing reality. Throughout the play (e.g. Act 1 Scene 1, lines 56–57; Act 2 Scene 2, line 32; Act 3 Scene 2, line 376; Act 4 Scene 1, line 165), Shakespeare seems to suggest that those in love perceive reality quite differently, ridiculously so, from others; beauty is truly in the eye of the beholder.
- Similarly, poets (like lovers) can with their 'eye' or 'imagination' manufacture their own worlds, 'shapes' or reality (see Theseus' explanation of this in Act 5 Scene 1, lines 7–18).
- This idea is reinforced at the end of the previous scene when the characters emerge from the forest, confused about love and reality (e.g. Hermia in Act 4 Scene 1, lines 184–85).

Q How does Bottom's language reflect his confusion about love and reality in Act 4 Scene 1, line 203?

3 The irrational nature of love

- As previously discussed, eyes are repeatedly associated throughout the play with the notion of irrational love. Characters continually and ludicrously change the objects of their love (Act 1 Scene 1, line 230; Act 4 Scene 1, lines 165–66; Act 2 Scene 2, lines 120–21), and even Titania claims that her 'eye is enthrallèd to [the] shape' of the donkey-headed Bottom (Act 3 Scene 1, line 108).

Q In Act 1 Scene 1 (lines 234–37), 'winged Cupid [is] painted blind'. What do you think is meant by the saying that love is blind and how does it relate to the characters and events of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

A final word about imagery in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

There's an old song from the 1950s that makes a connection similar to the one made by Shakespeare; perhaps you can hear Dean Martin crooning: '*When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's amore!*'

The various elements of Shakespeare's play (plots, characters and themes – especially amore or love) are masterfully woven together through abundant and powerful images relating to the moon and to eyes.

Act 4 Scene 2

CHARACTERS

Bottom
Quince
Flute
Snug
Starveling

IN A NUTSHELL

The actors are assembled at Peter Quince's house but no-one can find Bottom. They discuss his rare acting talents and their regret that they will not be able to perform the play without him. Without warning, Bottom enters and announces that he has wonderful things to report, of which he cannot inform them. He ends the scene with a motivational speech before they go off to perform the play.

Before you read

- Bottom is particularly jubilant (or happy) in this scene and his lines should reflect this.
- You might like to consider why Bottom does not share with his friends the details of his amazing experience. Is it because he himself does not understand what has happened? Or is it for some other reason entirely? This scene is open to a range of possible interpretations.

Wit: Skill; intelligence
Paramour: Lover
Naught: Nothing
An: If
Pumps: Light shoes for dancing

Athens. Quince's house.

[QUINCE, FLUTE, SNOUT and STARVELING enter]

QUINCE Have you sent to Bottom's house? Is he come home yet?
STARVELING He cannot be heard of; out of doubt he is transported.
FLUTE If he come not, then the play is marred; it goes not forward, doth it?
QUINCE It is not possible; you have not a man in all Athens able to discharge Pyramus but he.
FLUTE No, he hath simply the best wit of any handicraft man in Athens.
QUINCE Yea and the best person too; and he is a very paramour for a sweet voice.
FLUTE You must say '*paragon*': a paramour is, God bless us, a thing of naught.

[SNUG enters]

SNUG Masters, the Duke is coming from the temple, and there is two or three lords and ladies more married; if our sport had gone forward, we had all been made men.
FLUTE O sweet bully Bottom. Thus hath he lost sixpence a day during his life; he could not have 'scaped sixpence a day. If the Duke had not given him sixpence a day for playing Pyramus, I'll be hanged; he would have deserved it. Sixpence a day in Pyramus, or nothing.

[BOTTOM enters]

2 **Out of doubt he is transported:** Starveling could be saying that Bottom has been carried away, maybe to the spirit world. Alternatively, 'transported' may be a malapropism for transformed or translated.

8–11 **Paramour / paragon:** This is another malapropism. Quince clearly means 'paragon', which is a model of perfection, rather than 'paramour', which is a lover. Flute seems to muddle his words as well, when he describes the paramour as 'a thing of naught'.

13–14 **If our sport has gone forward, we had all been made men:** Snug envisages success and fortune had they performed the play. He seems to assume that their performance is so good that Theseus would have awarded the group generous pensions.

15 **Sixpence a day:** A considerable sum of money. You might remember that it cost a single penny to view one of Shakespeare's plays at the Globe Theatre.

BOTTOM Where are these lads? Where are these hearts?

QUINCE Bottom! O most courageous day! O most happy hour!

BOTTOM Masters, I am to discourse wonders; but ask me not what, for if I tell you, I am no true Athenian. I will tell you everything, right as it fell out.

QUINCE Let us hear, sweet Bottom.

BOTTOM Not a word of me. All that I will tell you is that the Duke hath dined. Get your apparel together: good strings to your beards, new ribbons to your pumps. Meet presently at the palace. Every man look o'er his part; for the short and the long is, our play is preferred. In any case, let Thisbe have clean linen, and let not him that plays the lion pare his nails, for they shall hang out for the lion's claws. And, most dear actors, eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath; and I do not doubt but to hear them say, it is a sweet comedy. No more words: away! Go, away!

[All exit]

26–27 **Get your apparel together … to your pumps:** Bottom tells the actors to get their costumes together. The strings are for their fake beards, the ribbons for their shoes or their 'pumps'.

28 **Preferred:** Chosen ahead of other plays. Since Theseus has yet to make his final choice, it seems this is something like being short-listed.

QUESTIONS

1 Why are the actors sorry for Bottom's absence?

2 What is the tone at the beginning of this scene and how does it change?

3 Find and explain a malapropism or two in this scene.

EXTEND

Shakespeare uses a number of techniques to create a comical tone in Act 4 Scene 2. Create and complete the following table to show your understanding of various comic elements that Shakespeare uses in this scene:

Ways in which Shakespeare creates a comical tone	Questions to consider
Dramatic irony: Flute says of Bottom, 'He hath simply the best wit of any handicraft man in Athens' (line 7).	*Does Bottom seem intelligent?* *What might Shakespeare be suggesting about the tradesmen?* *Is this attitude still prevalent today?*

Oxymoron and pun: Quince addresses Bottom as 'sweet Bottom' (line 24).	*How is this description an oxymoron?* *How is 'Bottom' a play on words?* *Would you usually expect these two words to be juxtaposed to (placed alongside) each other?* *Does Quince deliberately use these comic elements?* *Does this make his line funnier?*
Other ways?	Construct your own questions here

For a more detailed explanation of the comic elements that Shakespeare uses in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, see the techniques box on pages 129–30.

A word about multiple plots

By now, you would have observed that Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is actually a single play that contains multiple plots and sets of characters. In fact, there are five distinct yet interwoven narratives within a single story, including a play within the play. The table on the following page briefly summarises the major features of each plot line.

A multiple-plot structure is a typical Shakespearean convention or technique. Some of his more complex later plays, such as *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, work as clever combinations of a number of stories within one story. Each narrative within the greater narrative has something to say about the plays' central themes. So too, all **five narrative strands** of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* **reinforce** and even **parallel** each other, as they explore the nature of love, while focusing on the conflict between illusion and reality.

These storylines don't just work separately; they weave in and out, back and forth, as the characters interact with each other.

Character set		
Brief plot description	**Main setting**	**Language style**
Plot 1 Theseus and Hippolyta		
The wedding of Theseus (Duke of Athens) and Hippolyta (Queen of the Amazons) opens and closes the play.	Theseus' palace, Athens	Formal; typically blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter), but prose when the conversation includes the mechanicals.
Plot 2 Young lovers (Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena)		
Lysander and Hermia run away, into the forest, from Hermia's father, who opposes their relationship; Demetrius, who also loves Hermia, flees from Helena; conflict and confusion follow, as the lovers are in and out of love.	Forest outside Athens (night time)	Blank verse, except when passionately expressing emotions. The change is especially evident when, under the influence of the love potion, they speak in rhyming couplets and with hyperbole.
Plot 3 Fairy Kingdom		
Oberon (King of Fairies) is jealous of Titania's (Queen of Fairies) affection for a stolen human child; Puck and Oberon confuse the young lovers and Titania by means of a love potion.	Forest outside Athens (night time)	A variety of language styles, such as blank verse, rhyming couplets and trochaic tetrameter, emphasising its difference from the human world.
Plot 4 Mechanicals (Bottom and his tradesmen friends)		
A play (*Pyramus and Thisbe*), to be performed before Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding, is rehearsed.	Forest outside Athens (night time)	Prose; generally simple and unadorned speech, peppered with malapropisms.
Plot 5 Pyramus, Thisbe and other characters		
The mechanicals perform their play: *The tragic death of Pyramus and Thisbe*.	Theseus' palace, Athens	Highly exaggerated and artificial; some awful rhyme and inappropriate rhythm.

- Note that Theseus' wedding **frames** the text: it opens and closes the play, followed by a brief epilogue from the fairies. This aspect of the play's structure helps create a sense of resolution or closure.

- Also observe that the main action of the play occurs in the blurry darkness of the **forest**. It is here that the plot lines interweave, and the fairies magically interact with the young lovers and Bottom, creating comical confusion.
- Additionally, notice that it is in the final scene of the play that all plot lines **converge**: the tradesmen perform their play *Pyramus and Thisbe* in Theseus' palace at the triple wedding ceremony of Theseus and Hippolyta, Lysander and Hermia, and Demetrius and Helena. The fairies then enter to bless the marriages once the humans have retired to bed.
- There is another feature that Shakespeare exploits to help us make sense of these multiple plots. You may have noticed that each set of characters belonging to each storyline has its own language style or way of speaking. Some call this a narrative voice. See the section on Shakespeare's language (pages 8–14) for more detailed information about this feature.
- Finally, it is important to note that the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe* mirrors or parallels many aspects of what has already occurred in earlier scenes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Unfortunately, this play within the play (or **embedded narrative**) is performed terribly. In fact, the acting is so dreadful that the audience members (Theseus and Hippolyta, as well as the young lovers) miss the remarkable parallels to their own stories. Watch carefully for these parallels when you read Act 5 Scene 1 (Part 2).

Edwin Landseer's 'Scene from A Midsummer Night's Dream. Titania and Bottom', painted around 1850

Act 5

Act 5 Scene 1 (Part 1)

CHARACTERS

Theseus
Philostrate
Hippolyta
Lysander

IN A NUTSHELL

The three couples have already married and dined, and Theseus and Hippolyta discuss the young lovers' stories of the previous night. Although Theseus is sceptical, Hippolyta points out that all the lovers tell the same story. The other two couples enter and Theseus chooses a play for their entertainment. He dismisses a number of plays as boring or inappropriate before choosing Pyramus and Thisbe. *Hippolyta and Theseus' attendant, Philostrate, try to convince Theseus to choose some other play but he refuses to change his mind.*

Before you read

- The titles of the plays that Philostrate reads out are supposed to be comical. In Shakespeare's day, many playwrights gave their plays titles of this length and Shakespeare is probably making fun of this.
- Playwrights were also called 'poets' in Elizabethan England. It is interesting to consider that Shakespeare, who was also a poet (he wrote both plays and poetry), created a character like Theseus, who is utterly dismissive of poets. Although Theseus' statement that the poet 'gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name' (lines 16–17) is supposed to be critical, it sounds like Shakespeare is paying his own profession a backhanded compliment.

V

Fancy:	Imagination
Board:	Table loaded with food
Masque:	Musical drama
Revels:	Celebrations or festivities
Abridgement:	Entertainment that will make the time pass more quickly
Satire:	A literary work that ridicules human behaviour and institutions

The palace of Theseus.

[THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, PHILOSTRATE, Lords and Attendants enter]

HIPPOLYTA 'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of.

THESEUS More strange than true; I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
That is, the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That if it would but apprehend some joy.
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

HIPPOLYTA But all the story of the night told o'er,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images
And grows to something of great constancy;
But, howsoever, strange and admirable.

THESEUS Here come the lovers, full of joy and mirth.

[LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HERMIA and HELENA enter]

Joy, gentle friends! Joy and fresh days of love

2–6 **More strange than true … reason ever comprehends:** Theseus finds the lovers' stories too strange to believe. He equates lovers with madmen and asserts that more calm and rational minds do not believe these sorts of things. 'Antique' here means either ancient or grotesque.

8 **Compact:** In agreement.

11 **Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:** Is unable to distinguish between a beautiful fair complexion (like that of Helen of Troy) and a dark complexion (an Egyptian brow).

18–20 **Such tricks hath … bringer of that joy:** These tricks of the imagination bring so much joy that some imagine there to be a supernatural cause for it.

24–27 **And all their minds … strange and admirable:** Hippolyta asserts that, although the lovers' stories are strange, the fact that they all agree gives them credibility ('transfigured' = changed or affected; 'constancy' = consistent and therefore true).

Accompany your hearts!

LYSANDER More than to us
Wait in your royal walks, your board, your bed!

THESEUS Come now, what masques, what dances shall we have,
To wear away this long age of three hours
Between our after-supper and bed-time?
Where is our usual manager of mirth?
What revels are in hand? Is there no play
To ease the anguish of a torturing hour?
Call Philostrate.

PHILOSTRATE Here, mighty Theseus.

THESEUS Say, what abridgement have you for this evening?
What masque? What music? How shall we beguile
The lazy time, if not with some delight?

PHILOSTRATE There is a brief how many sports are ripe:
Make choice of which your highness will see first.

[Gives THESEUS a paper]

THESEUS *[Reads] The battle with the Centaurs, to be sung*
By an Athenian eunuch to the harp.
We'll none of that; that have I told my love,
In glory of my kinsman Hercules.

[Reads] *The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals,*
Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage.
That is an old device, and it was played
When I from Thebes came last a conqueror.

[Reads] *The thrice three Muses mourning for the death*
Of Learning, late deceased in beggary.
That is some satire, keen and critical,
Not sorting with a nuptial ceremony.

[Reads] *A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus*
And his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth.
Merry and tragical! Tedious and brief!
That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow.
How shall we find the concord of this discord?

44 **Centaurs:** Powerful mythical creatures; a centaur has the head and upper body of a man, and the legs and lower body of a horse.

45 **Eunuch:** A male who has been castrated so he can sing with a high, unbroken voice.

48 **Tipsy Bacchanals:** Women in ancient Greek myth who tore Orpheus to pieces while drunkenly worshipping the Greek god Bacchus.

49 **Thracian:** From Thrace in north-eastern Greece.

60 **How shall we find the concord of this discord:** A paraphrase of this might read, 'How shall we make sense of this nonsense?' ('concord' = agreement; 'discord' = disagreement).

PHILOSTRATE A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,
Which is as brief as I have known a play;
But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,
Which makes it tedious; for in all the play
There is not one word apt, one player fitted.
And tragical, my noble lord, it is,
For Pyramus therein doth kill himself.
Which, when I saw rehearsed, I must confess,
Made mine eyes water; but more merry tears
The passion of loud laughter never shed.

THESEUS What are they that do play it?

PHILOSTRATE Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,
Which never laboured in their minds till now;
And now have toiled their unbreathed memories
With this same play, against your nuptial.

THESEUS And we will hear it.

PHILOSTRATE No, my noble lord;
It is not for you. I have heard it over,
And it is nothing, nothing in the world;
Unless you can find sport in their intents,
Extremely stretched and conned with cruèl pain,
To do you service.

THESEUS I will hear that play;
For never anything can be amiss,
When simpleness and duty tender it.
Go, bring them in – and take your places, ladies.

[PHILOSTRATE exits]

HIPPOLYTA I love not to see wretchedness o'ercharged
And duty in his service perishing.

THESEUS Why, gentle sweet, you shall see no such thing.

HIPPOLYTA He says they can do nothing in this kind.

THESEUS The kinder we, to give them thanks for nothing.
Our sport shall be to take what they mistake;
And what poor duty cannot do, noble respect
Takes it in might, not merit.
Where I have come, great clerks have purposèd
To greet me with premeditated welcomes;

82–83 **For never anything … duty tender it:** Nothing can ever be wrong ('amiss') when it is offered in a spirit of humble service.

85–86 **I love not to see … his service perishing:** Hippolyta is stating that she doesn't like people being pushed beyond their talents and so failing.

Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,
Make periods in the midst of sentences,
Throttle their practised accent in their fears
And in conclusion dumbly have broke off,
Not paying me a welcome. Trust me, sweet,
Out of this silence yet I picked a welcome;
And in the modesty of fearful duty
I read as much as from the rattling tongue
Of saucy and audacious eloquence.
Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity
In least speak most, to my capacity.

[PHILOSTRATE re-enters]

PHILOSTRATE So please your grace, the Prologue is addressed.
THESEUS Let him approach.

91–103 **What poor duty cannot do … audacious eloquence:** Theseus claims that they will gain pleasure from taking the actors seriously, even if their performance is of a very low standard, and asserts that doing this is appropriate for people of a higher class. He also feels that people's good intentions are important, and gives the example of some men having once come to welcome him. Even though, in their anxiety, these men could not speak properly, he nevertheless felt warmly welcomed, and acted appropriately.

QUESTIONS

1 Why does Theseus dismiss the stories of the young lovers?
2 Read Theseus's short speech beginning 'Here come the lovers …' (lines 28–30). What positive words emphasise his jubilant (or happy) mood?
3 Why does Theseus choose the play *Pyramus and Thisbe*?
4 What do you think Philostrate means when he describes the actors as 'hard-handed men' (line 72)?
5 Why does Theseus describe the full title of *Pyramus and Thisbe* as 'hot-ice'? What literary device does he employ by this description? Find some other examples of this device in lines 56–60.
6 Summarise Philostrate's criticisms of the play in one or two sentences.

EXTEND

1 Can you find any evidence of affection for Theseus in the first line Hippolyta speaks in this scene?
2 Theseus claims that lovers are like madmen and poets. What do lovers, madmen and poets have in common? Explain Theseus' reasoning.
3 What do you think Theseus means when he tells Hippolyta, 'Our sport shall be to take what they mistake' (line 90)?
4 Why do you think Shakespeare includes Hippolyta and Theseus' discussion at the beginning of this scene? What is the tone of their discussion?

A word about comic language in *Pyramus and Thisbe*

The play that the mechanicals perform is extraordinarily bad (or egregious – pronounced *e-gree-jee-us*) and, because of this, very funny. Much of the play's badness comes from the excessive use of poetic devices such as alliteration and repetition. When used moderately, these devices can be very effective; when used to excess, they don't work well at all. You might consider the analogy of eating one or two pieces of your favourite pizza, followed by a bowl of ice cream. Then consider them mixed together with two of your other favourite foods. Now imagine having to eat bowl after bowl of this: it's a sickening mess. The play of *Pyramus and Thisbe* is the dramatic equivalent of this, but the worse it gets, the more amusing it is.

Alliteration is the repetition of the consonant sounds at the beginning of words. It can be used effectively to create a specific atmosphere or a certain mood. But when used excessively, it is comical – think of Dr Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat*, for instance. The mechanicals want the audience to be moved by the play but their overabundant use of alliteration does not achieve this. Consider lines 144–45 from the Prologue: 'with bloody blameful blade / He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast.' Not only is this excessive, and thus ridiculous, but the audience is also left with the impression that many of these words have been chosen simply because they begin with the letter 'b'.

Repetition of a sound, word, phrase, line or idea, when used moderately, can be very effective. However, in the play, words or phrases are often repeated in a way that is melodramatic or simply unnecessary, as in Pyramus' dying speech: 'Now die, die, die, die, die' (line 286).

Unnecessary or obvious detail: The mechanicals' play is full of unnecessary and obvious details. For example, Pyramus pointlessly asserts: 'O night, which ever art when day is not!' (line 166) – this is obvious, and the audience rightly thinks, 'well, duh … it's never day in the night time'. Pyramus and Thisbe's dialogue is packed with irrelevant or inaccurate classical allusions. Likewise, the audience might wonder why Thisbe informs them that her dead lover's eyes 'were green as leeks' (line 311).

Synaesthesia involves the mixing or confusing of the senses. Probably the most common example of this device is describing a colour as loud. The technique was used to great effect by nineteenth-century French poets, like Baudelaire. Here is an example of synaesthesia capturing the intense smell of perfume by the Australian poet Michael Dransfield: 'listen to [your] perfume / colour the night a cool, cool green'. Unfortunately for the mechanicals, synaesthesia does not have this same effect in their play. When Pyramus says, 'I can hear my Thisbe's face,' (line 186) it seems unintentional and merely bad, inaccurate writing, further adding to the humorous quality of their play.

Poor or forced rhyme: The vast majority of the mechanicals' play is written in rhyme, which is very challenging for any writer. The result is that the script is packed with half-rhymes like 'know' and 'woo' or forced rhymes like 'sinister' and 'whisper' that really don't work.

Poor syntax: Syntax relates to the ordering of words in a sentence. In order to make the lines rhyme, a writer has to change the natural order of the words in places. For example, in order to rhyme with 'thorn' the Prologue contains the line 'By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn' (lines 133 and 135). The order of these words, while necessary to make the line rhyme, seems unnatural.

Clichés: A cliché is a phrase that has lost its power through overuse, such as describing someone as 'cold as ice'. In *Pyramus and Thisbe*, 'cherry lips' is a very obvious and unoriginal description taken from romantic poetry. Of course, what was a cliché in Shakespeare's time is difficult to pick today. You might like turn to Appendix 2 on page 155 and read a sonnet Shakespeare wrote that mocks the clichés in love poetry.

Malapropisms involve unintentionally using the wrong word, often with humorous results. The scenes involving the mechanicals are filled with malapropisms and some of these spill over into the play. For example, both Bottom (as Pyramus) and Flute (as Thisbe) say Ninny's tomb, instead of Ninus' tomb. A ninny is a silly or foolish person. For a more detailed explanation of malapropisms, see page 116.

Act 5 Scene 1 (Part 2)

CHARACTERS

Theseus
Bottom *(as Pyramus)*
Quince *(as the Prologue)*
Flute *(as Thisbe)*
Demetrius
Hippolyta
Snout *(as Wall)*
Snug *(as Lion)*
Lysander
Starveling *(as Moonshine)*
Philostrate

IN A NUTSHELL

The play is performed before the three couples, who make fun of the actors. After Quince reads an introduction (Prologue) that summarises the action of the play, the tradesmen act out the story. Theseus declines to hear the Epilogue (the closing speech) and the actors finish with a dance. Before the lovers retire to bed, Theseus announces that there will be two weeks of celebrations.

Before you read

- The story of the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* is as follows: the lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe, being separated by a wall, agree to meet at Ninus' Tomb at night. Thisbe arrives first but is scared away by a lion that tears apart the cloak she drops, staining it with the blood of another animal. Unaware of this, Pyramus arrives and, finding Thisbe's bloodied cloak, assumes she has been killed. Pyramus commits suicide and his body is discovered by Thisbe, who then kills herself with Pyramus' dagger.
- The most important thing to note for this scene is that the actors are terrible and their script is awful. The more you emphasise these features in your performance the better. You will find at the same time that you will not have to work too hard; the badness of the play will generally speak for itself.
- The play contains a number of allusions to ancient myths but these are not important for your understanding of this scene. They are generally unnecessary or inappropriate and sometimes inaccurate (see **Text notes**), which is further evidence of the poor quality of the script.

Mantle:	Cloak
Discretion:	Subtlety or good taste; caution
Partition:	Wall
Discourse:	Talk or converse (when used as a verb)
Yonder:	Over there
Mural:	Wall
Bergomask dance:	A traditional country or rural dance

Athens. The palace of Theseus.

[Flourish of trumpets, then QUINCE enters to deliver the Prologue]

QUINCE (Prologue) If we offend, it is with our good will.
That you should think, we come not to offend,
But with good will. To show our simple skill,
That is the true beginning of our end.
Consider then we come but in despite.
We do not come as minding to contest you,
Our true intent is. All for your delight
We are not here. That you should here repent you,
The actors are at hand and by their show
You shall know all that you are like to know.

THESEUS This fellow doth not stand upon points.

LYSANDER He hath rid his Prologue like a rough colt; he knows not the stop. A good moral, my lord: it is not enough to speak, but to speak true.

HIPPOLYTA Indeed he hath played on his Prologue like a child on a recorder: a sound, but not in government.

THESEUS His speech was like a tangled chain: nothing impaired, but all disordered. Who is next?

[BOTTOM (as Pyramus) and FLUTE (as Thisbe) enter, followed by SNOUT (as Wall), STARVELING (as Moonshine) and SNUG (as Lion)]

QUINCE (Prologue) Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show;
But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.
This man is Pyramus, if you would know;
This beauteous lady Thisbe is certain.
This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth present
Wall, that vile Wall which did these lovers sunder;
And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content
To whisper. At the which let no man wonder.
This man, with lanthorn, dog, and bush of thorn,
Presenteth Moonshine; for, if you will know,
By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn
To meet at Ninus' tomb, there, there to woo.
This grisly beast, which Lion hight by name,
The trusty Thisbe, coming first by night,
Did scare away, or rather did affright;
And, as she fled, her mantle she did fall,
Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.
Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall,
And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain:
Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade,
He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast.
And Thisbe, tarrying in mulberry shade,
His dagger drew, and died. For all the rest,
Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and lovers twain
At large discourse, while here they do remain.

[Prologue, Thisbe, Lion and Moonshine exit]

THESEUS I wonder if the lion be to speak.

DEMETRIUS No wonder, my lord: one lion may, when many asses do.

SNOUT (Wall) In this same interlude it doth befall
That I, one Snout by name, present a wall.

118 **This fellow doth not stand upon points:** The man speaking the Prologue (Quince) does not pay attention to the punctuation. Theseus is commenting on Quince's terrible delivery of the poetry.

130 **Sunder:** Keep apart.

152 **Interlude:** Short play.

And such a wall, as I would have you think,
That had in it a crannied hole or chink,
Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe,
Did whisper often very secretly.
This loam, this rough-cast, and this stone, doth show
That I am that same wall; the truth is so.
And this the cranny is, right and sinister,
Through which the fearful lovers are to whisper.

THESEUS Would you desire lime and hair to speak better?

DEMETRIUS It is the wittiest partition that ever I heard discourse, my lord.

[Pyramus enters]

THESEUS Pyramus draws near the wall: silence!

BOTTOM (Pyramus) O grim-looked night! O night with hue so black!
O night, which ever art when day is not!
O night, O night! Alack, alack, alack,
I fear my Thisbe's promise is forgot!
And thou, O wall, O sweet, O lovely wall,
That stand'st between her father's ground and mine!
Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall,
Show me thy chink, to blink through with mine eyne!

[Wall holds up his fingers]

Thanks, courteous wall. Jove shield thee well for this!
But what see I? No Thisbe do I see.
O wicked wall, through whom I see no bliss!
Cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me!

THESEUS The wall, methinks, being sensible, should curse again.

BOTTOM (Himself) No, in truth, sir, he should not. '*Deceiving me*' is Thisbe's cue: she is to enter now, and I am to spy her through the wall. You shall see; it will fall pat as I told you. Yonder she comes.

[Thisbe enters]

FLUTE (Thisbe) O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans,
For parting my fair Pyramus and me!
My cherry lips have often kissed thy stones,
Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee.

BOTTOM (Pyramus) I see a voice: now will I to the chink,
To spy an I can hear my Thisbe's face.
Thisbe!

FLUTE (Thisbe) My love thou art, my love I think.

173 **Jove:** Abbreviated form of Jupiter (*Jovem* in Latin), chief of the Roman gods.

177 **Being sensible:** Being conscious; using his faculties or senses.

BOTTOM (Pyramus) Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's grace;
And, like Limander, am I trusty still.
FLUTE (Thisbe) And I like Helen, till the Fates me kill.
BOTTOM (Pyramus) Not Shafalus to Procrus was so true.
FLUTE (Thisbe) As Shafalus to Procrus, I to you.
BOTTOM (Pyramus) O kiss me through the hole of this vile wall!
FLUTE (Thisbe) I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all.
BOTTOM (Pyramus) Wilt thou at Ninny's tomb meet me straightway?
FLUTE (Thisbe) 'Tide life, 'tide death, I come without delay.

[Pyramus and Thisbe exit]

SNOUT (Wall) Thus have I, Wall, my part dischargèd so;
And, being done, thus Wall away doth go.

[Wall exits]

THESEUS Now is the mural down between the two neighbours.
DEMETRIUS No remedy, my lord, when walls are so wilful to hear without warning.
HIPPOLYTA This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.
THESEUS The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.
HIPPOLYTA It must be your imagination then, and not theirs.
THESEUS If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men. Here come two noble beasts in: a man and a lion.

[Lion and Moonshine enter]

SNUG (Lion) You, ladies, you, whose gentle hearts do fear
The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor,
May now perchance both quake and tremble here,
When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.
Then know that I, one Snug the joiner, am
A lion-fell, nor else no lion's dam;
For, if I should as lion come in strife
Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.
THESEUS A very gentle beast, and of a good conscience.

189 **Limander:** A malapropism for Leander, a hero of ancient myth who swam the Hellespont (a wide strait of water, known today as the Dardanelles, near Gallipoli) to visit his lover.

190 **And I like Helen, till the Fates me kill:** In Greek myth, the Fates determined a person's life span, so Thisbe is claiming to be faithful unto death. This is ironic because Helen was notoriously unfaithful. Rather than Helen, Flute means Hero, who was Leander's lover.

191 **Shafalus:** Yet another malapropism; Bottom means Cephalus, who remained faithful to his wife Procrus when the goddess Aurora abducted her.

203–04 **The best in this kind … amend them:** Theseus is saying that the best acting is imitation, so the worst cannot be any worse than this when it is improved ('amended') by the imagination.

214 **No lion's dam:** No lion's mother – he is not a lioness.

DEMETRIUS The very best at a beast, my lord, that e'er I saw.
LYSANDER This lion is a very fox for his valour.
THESEUS True, and a goose for his discretion.
DEMETRIUS Not so, my lord; for his valour cannot carry his discretion; and the fox carries the goose.
THESEUS His discretion, I am sure, cannot carry his valour, for the goose carries not the fox. It is well: leave it to his discretion, and let us listen to the moon.
STARV. (Moonshine) This lanthorn doth the hornèd moon present –
DEMETRIUS He should have worn the horns on his head.
THESEUS He is no crescent, and his horns are invisible within the circumference.
STARV. (Moonshine) This lanthorn doth the hornèd moon present;
Myself the man i' the moon do seem to be.
THESEUS This is the greatest error of all the rest; the man should be put into the lanthorn. How is it else the man i' the moon?
DEMETRIUS He dares not come there for the candle; for, you see, it is already in snuff.
HIPPOLYTA I am aweary of this moon; would he would change!
THESEUS It appears, by his small light of discretion, that he is in the wane; but yet, in courtesy, in all reason, we must stay the time.
LYSANDER Proceed, Moon.
STARV. (Moonshine) All that I have to say, is, to tell you that the lanthorn is the moon; I, the man in the moon; this thorn-bush, my thorn-bush; and this dog, my dog.
DEMETRIUS Why, all these should be in the lanthorn; for all these are in the moon. But, silence! Here comes Thisbe.

[Thisbe enters]

FLUTE (Thisbe) This is old Ninny's tomb. Where is my love?

219–20 **This lion is … for his discretion:** This lion has the courage of a fox and as much caution ('discretion') as a goose. This is amusing because in ancient fables the lion was presented as brave, the fox as cunning and the goose as stupid.

226 **Hornèd moon:** Crescent moon (in the shape of a horn).

227–34 **He should have worn … is already in snuff:** A series of jokes and puns at the expense of the actor playing Moonshine. Demetrius jokes that, because the moon is 'hornèd' (or has horns), he is a cuckold or a man whose wife has been unfaithful. In response to Starveling's claim to be the man in the moon, Theseus jokes that he should then be in the lantern ('lanthorn'), since the lantern is the moon; this joke ridicules the actors' overly literalist interpretation of the script. Demetrius further jokes that the actor is afraid to put himself in the lantern because of the candle, which (because of the poor quality of their performance) is already in danger of being snuffed out.

236–37 **It appears, by his small … we must stay the time:** Theseus jokes that the moon is already waning (decreasing in size) because the light of the actor's discretion is so slight. Here 'discretion' means subtlety or good taste.

239–41 **All that I have to say … and this dog, my dog:** Starveling seems to lose his nerve and paraphrases his lines in prose rather than poetry. Various ancient traditions record the story of the man in the moon. In some versions, he carries a thornbush and is accompanied by a dog.

SNUG (Lion) *[Roaring]* Oh –

[Thisbe runs off]

DEMETRIUS Well roared, Lion.
THESEUS Well run, Thisbe.
HIPPOLYTA Well shone, Moon. Truly, the moon shines with a good grace.

[The Lion shakes Thisbe's mantle, and they exit]

THESEUS Well mousèd, Lion.
DEMETRIUS And then came Pyramus.
LYSANDER And so the lion vanishèd.

[Pyramus enters]

BOTTOM (Pyramus) Sweet Moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams.
I thank thee, Moon, for shining now so bright;
For, by thy gracious, golden, glittering gleams,
I trust to take of truest Thisbe sight.
But stay, O spite!
But mark, poor knight,
What dreadful dole is here!
Eyes, do you see?
How can it be?
O dainty duck! O dear!
Thy mantle good,
What, stained with blood!
Approach, ye Furies fell!
O Fates, come, come,
Cut thread and thrum;
Quail, crush, conclude, and quell!
THESEUS This passion, and the death of a dear friend, would go near to make a man look sad.
HIPPOLYTA Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man.
BOTTOM (Pyramus) O wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions frame?
Since lion vile hath here deflowered my dear:
Which is – no, no – which was the fairest dame
That lived, that loved, that liked, that looked with cheer.
Come, tears, confound;
Out, sword, and wound
The pap of Pyramus,
Ay, that left pap,
Where heart doth hop.

[Pyramus stabs himself]

264 **Furies fell:** Cruel instruments of justice ('fell' = cruel).
275 **Confound:** Confuse.
277 **Pap:** Breast.

Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.
Now am I dead,
Now am I fled;
My soul is in the sky:
Tongue, lose thy light;
Moon take thy flight.

[Moonshine exits]

Now die, die, die, die, die.

[Pyramus dies]

DEMETRIUS No die, but an ace, for him; for he is but one.

LYSANDER Less than an ace, man; for he is dead; he is nothing.

THESEUS With the help of a surgeon he might yet recover, and prove an ass.

HIPPOLYTA How chance Moonshine is gone before Thisbe comes back and finds her lover?

THESEUS She will find him by starlight. Here she comes, and her passion ends the play.

[Thisbe re-enters]

HIPPOLYTA Methinks she should not use a long one for such a Pyramus; I hope she will be brief.

DEMETRIUS A mote will turn the balance, which Pyramus, which Thisbe, is the better; he for a man, God warrant us; she for a woman, God bless us.

LYSANDER She hath spied him already with those sweet eyes.

DEMETRIUS And thus she means, videlicet –

FLUTE (Thisbe) Asleep, my love?
What, dead, my dove?
O Pyramus, arise!
Speak, speak. Quite dumb?
Dead, dead? A tomb
Must cover thy sweet eyes.
These lilly lips,
This cherry nose,
These yellow cowslip cheeks,
Are gone, are gone.
Lovers, make moan:
His eyes were green as leeks.
O Sisters Three,
Come, come to me,

287–88 **No die, but an ace … he is nothing:** Demetrius plays on the word 'die', which is also the singular of dice. An 'ace' is the single dot (representing the number one) on a die; therefore, Demetrius is saying he is only one man dying. Lysander replies that he is less than one (or 'nothing') since he is dead.

299 **Videlicet:** Latin word meaning 'in other words' (pronounced *vi-del-i-cet*).

With hands as pale as milk;
Lay them in gore,
Since you have shore
With shears his thread of silk.
Tongue, not a word.
Come, trusty sword:
Come, blade, my breast imbrue.

[Thisbe stabs herself]

And, farewell, friends;
Thus Thisbe ends.
Adieu, adieu, adieu.

[Thisbe dies]

THESEUS Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead.

DEMETRIUS Ay, and Wall too.

BOTTOM (Himself) *[Starting up]* No, I assure you; the wall is down that parted their fathers. Will it please you to see the Epilogue, or to hear a Bergomask dance between two of our company?

THESEUS No Epilogue, I pray you, for your play needs no excuse. Never excuse; for when the players are all dead, there needs none to be blamed. Marry, if he that writ it had played Pyramus and hanged himself in Thisbe's garter, it would have been a fine tragedy. And so it is, truly, and very notably discharged. But come, your Bergomask: let your Epilogue alone.

[A dance]

The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve:
Lovers, to bed; 'tis almost fairy time.
I fear we shall out-sleep the coming morn
As much as we this night have overwatched.
This palpable-gross play hath well beguiled
The heavy gait of night. Sweet friends, to bed.
A fortnight hold we this solemnity,
In nightly revels and new jollity.

[All exit]

320 **Imbrue:** Stab.

331–32 **Marry, if he that … have been a fine tragedy:** Theseus jokes that if the author of *Pyramus and Thisbe* had dressed as Thisbe and hanged himself, then it would have been a fine tragedy. Theseus is joking cruelly about the quality of the work.

335 **The iron tongue of midnight:** The clapper of the bell that tolled ('told') at midnight.

339 **Palpable-gross:** Crudely literal in its physical details.

QUESTIONS

1 Read through the Prologue of *Pyramus and Thisbe* (lines 108–17).
   a What is wrong with it?
   b Does it add anything to the play?

2 Lysander, Hippolyta and Theseus use different comparisons to describe Quince's terrible delivery of the Prologue (lines 119–24). Explain your favourite of these three comparisons.

3 In small groups or individually, copy and complete the table on comic language in this scene (for help, see the box on comic language on pages 129–30).

Character	Line	Technique and explanation of why it is comical
	'Now die, die, die, die, die.' (line 286)	
	'O dainty duck! O dear!' (line 261)	Excessive alliteration and inappropriate language for confronting the death of a loved one.
	'O night, which ever art when day is not!' (line 166)	
	'I can hear my Thisbe's face' (line 186)	
	'That I am that same wall; the truth is so' (line 159)	
		Excessive alliteration.
	'Cherry lips' (line 182)	
		Unnecessary or melodramatic repetition.
	'Thy mantle good, What, stained with blood!' (lines 262–63)	
		Poor or unnatural syntax.
Pyramus		A malapropism: he means killed or eaten whole but this phrase means to take away a girl's virginity.
	'My soul is in the sky' (line 283)	
Thisbe	'With hands as pale as milk' (line 314)	
		Unintentional synaesthesia: this sounds inaccurate or carelessly written.

		Half or forced rhyme.
	'Will it please you to see the epilogue?' (line 327)	

4 If you were directing a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, what would you have Wall doing while the lovers are wooing?

5 When Theseus wonders if the lion will speak, Demetrius answers, 'No wonder, my lord: one lion may, when many asses do' (lines 150–51).
   a What is he suggesting about the actors?
   b Of what previous event does the word 'asses' remind us?

6 What mistake or mistakes do you think Bottom makes in his performance as Pyramus?

7 What is the audience response that Quince and Bottom hope for when Bottom discovers the dead body of Thisbe? Why don't they achieve this response?

8 What is Hippolyta's opinion of the play? Give evidence for your answer.

9 Although it is meant to be serious, in what ways is Thisbe's final speech humorous?

10 Helena and Hermia do not make any comments during the play. Why do you think Shakespeare chooses to have them keep silent?

11 When the mechanicals interact with the audience, it destroys the illusion the actors rely upon to draw the audience into the world of the play. Copy and complete the table below to demonstrate your understanding of this concept.

Character	Lines or actions	How it destroys the illusion of the theatre
	'All I have to say, is, to tell you that …' (line 239)	
Snug	'Then know that I, one Snug the joiner, am …' (line 13)	
		Engaging with the audience's comments and revealing what happens next
	'No, I assure you; the wall is down that parted their fathers' (line 326)	

12 Why do you think Theseus does not want to hear the Epilogue?

13 How appropriate do you think the choice of the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* is for a wedding?

EXTEND

1 The first ten lines of Quince's Prologue contradict his intending meaning. How would you punctuate it differently to make his meaning clear? Your teacher may photocopy the Prologue in order for you to do this activity.

2 What do you think Theseus means when he jokes, 'Well mousèd, Lion' (line 249)?

3 When Hippolyta complains about the moon, Theseus replies, 'It appears, by his small light of discretion, that he is in the wane' (line 236). What does he mean by this?

4 Much of the comedy in the play *Pyramus and Thisbe* is created when the actors convey meanings of which they are unaware. Copy and complete the table below.

Lines	Intended meaning	Literal / comic meaning
'… deflowered my dear' (line 272)	'Devoured' my dear	A malapropism – 'deflowered' suggests the lion has taken her virginity.
'If we offend, it is with our good will' (line 108)	We mean well and hope we don't offend	
'All for your delight we are not here' (lines 114–15)		

5 What does Demetrius mean when he jokes, 'a mote will turn the balance, which Pyramus, which Thisbe, is the better; he for a man, God warrant us: she for a woman' (lines 296–97)? (Hint: a 'mote' is a speck of dust.)

6 When Theseus states that Thisbe's 'passion ends the play' (292–95), Hippolyta responds, 'Methinks she should not use a long one for such a Pyramus'. What does she mean by this?

7 'Cherry lips' becomes a 'cherry nose' (line 307) later in Thisbe's lines. What does this tell us about the writer of *Pyramus and Thisbe* or perhaps Flute as an actor?

8 In response to Bottom's dying speech, Hippolyta says, 'Beshrew my heart, but I do begin to pity the man' (line 270). How might this statement be ambiguous (or understood in more than one way)?

9 Do you think the comments of the people viewing the play enhance or enrich the comedy? Do you find that you are laughing with the lovers, or are you sympathetic towards the actors, or both?

DISCUSS

1. If you were directing the play within the play, what aspects might you add to help present a comical feel? Consider aspects such as lighting and sound (including music), costumes, props, players' actions and voice. Discuss your answers in small groups and then share them with the rest of the class.
2. In groups, draw a labelled diagram of an aerial view of a stage, showing where you would place the mechanicals and the three couples who constitute the audience.

Michael Hoffman: DVD Chapter 21 (The Mechanical's play)

PRESS PLAY

1. How does Hoffman distinguish the mechanicals from the other entertainers at the beginning of this scene?
2. What elements of the setting emphasise Theseus' class and wealth?
3. How do the actors playing the mechanicals make their state of nervousness evident?
4. In Act 3, the mechanicals initially decide to open a window for natural moonlight but resolve, at a later stage, to have an actor present moonshine. How does Hoffman explain this?
5. The language of the mechanicals' play is humorous in and of itself. Hoffman, however, adds several elements to help the modern audience understand just how ridiculous their performance is. Consider how the actors deliver their lines, the 'audience's' facial expressions and laughter, the mechanicals' exaggerated actions and gestures, and even the humorous actions of the dog.
   a. Do you think these additional elements are necessary?
   b. Which additional element(s) do you find most effective?
6. The audience begins by laughing at Thisbe's final speech but is ultimately moved.
   a. Why do you think Hoffman chooses to do this?
   b. How does Hoffman use camera work and diegetic sound (the sound contained within the world of the film, as opposed to the soundtrack) to emphasise the change of the audience's mood?
   c. What gestures or actions does the actor playing Thisbe use to connect with the audience? Do you think his acting cuts through the illusion, perhaps even ironically?
7. How does Hoffman present Philostrate as an arrogant snob? Consider costume, facial expression, actions and props in your answer.

Act 5 Scene 1 (Part 3)

CHARACTERS

Puck
Oberon
Titania

IN A NUTSHELL

The play ends with a series of brief speeches and songs. Puck enters and delivers a speech about it being a frightening time of the night, then begins to sweep the floor. Oberon and Titania enter, with their fairy servants, and sing a song that blesses the married couples and their future children. Puck ends the play by addressing the audience directly. He invites them, if offended, to consider the whole play a dream, before asking for applause and bidding them good night.

Before you read

- Oberon's final speech is a song, accompanied by a dance. This might affect the way you read in class.

V

Shroud:	The cloth in which a dead body is wrapped before burial
Hallowed:	Holy or sacred
Ditty:	A simple, short song
By rote:	Repeating from memory
Prodigious:	Ominous; hinting at some unfortunate future
Reprehend:	Judge or criticise

Athens. The palace of Theseus.

[PUCK enters]

PUCK

Now the hungry lion roars,
And the wolf behowls the moon;
Whilst the heavy ploughman snores,
All with weary task fordone.
Now the wasted brands do glow,
Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,

347 **Now the wasted brands do glow:** The logs in the fire are burnt out but still glowing; it is late at night.

Puts the wretch that lies in woe
In remembrance of a shroud.
Now it is the time of night
That the graves all gaping wide,
Everyone lets forth his sprite,
In the church-way paths to glide.
And we fairies, that do run
By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the sun,
Following darkness like a dream,
Now are frolic: not a mouse
Shall disturb this hallowed house.
I am sent with broom before,
To sweep the dust behind the door.

[OBERON and TITANIA enter, with their train]

OBERON Through the house give glimm'ring light,
By the dead and drowsy fire;
Every elf and fairy sprite
Hop as light as bird from brier;
And this ditty, after me,
Sing, and dance it trippingly.

TITANIA First, rehearse this song by rote,
To each word a warbling note.
Hand in hand, with fairy grace,
Will we sing, and bless this place:

[Song and dance]

OBERON *Now, until the break of day,*
Through this house each fairy stray.
To the best bride-bed will we,
Which by us shall blessèd be;
And the issue there create
Ever shall be fortunate.
So shall all the couples three
Ever true in loving be;
And the blots of Nature's hand

356 **Triple Hecate's team:** The horses pulling the chariot of the goddess, Hecate. Here, 'triple' relates to the belief that this goddess has three aspects: Persephone, Diana and Phoebe.

359 **Frolic:** Happy or at play.

361–62 **I am sent … behind the door:** Puck has been sent (presumably by Oberon) to sweep the floor. This was one of the kinder activities that Puck was said to perform in Elizabethan folklore.

Shall not in their issue stand;
Never mole, hare lip, nor scar,
Nor mark prodigious, such as are
Despisèd in nativity,
Shall upon their children be.
With this field-dew consecrate,
Every fairy take his gait;
And each several chamber bless,
Through this palace, with sweet peace;
And the owner of it blest
Ever shall in safety rest.
Trip away; make no stay;
Meet me all by break of day.

[OBERON and TITANIA exit, with their train]

PUCK

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream.
Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon, we will mend.
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearnèd luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long,
Else the Puck a liar call.
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

[Exit]

382–85 **Shall not in their … in nativity:** The children of the couples will be born without any marks or blemishes. It was assumed by some that details like birthmarks were caused by the activity of the spirit world.

387 **Consecrate:** Make sacred.

388 **Take his gait:** Be on his way (or make tracks).

402 **Mend:** Improve (do better next time).

404 **If we have unearnèd luck:** If we are lucky.

405 **'Scape the serpent's tongue:** Escape the hissing of the audience. In Shakespeare's time, theatre audiences were much more vocal in their disapproval and would not be afraid to hiss or boo in response to a play they did not enjoy.

406 **Make amends ere long:** Make corrections before long.

410 **Restore amends:** Put things right.

QUESTIONS

1. List two frightening images that Puck presents in his opening speech.
2. What helpful action does Puck perform?
3. Oberon blesses the couples and their future children ('their issue') in this scene. How does this action contribute to the play's happy ending?
4. What poetic device does Shakespeare employ to add to the festive or happy mood of Oberon and Titania's speeches?
5. What is the purpose of Puck's closing speech?

EXTEND

1. With big casts and smaller acting companies, the practice of **doubling** was very common among the acting companies in Shakespeare's day. Doubling involved actors playing two or more characters. Many scholars think the actors playing Theseus and Hippolyta would have also played Oberon and Titania.
   a. Would this be possible throughout the entire play? Why or why not?
   b. What feature of this scene allows Shakespeare to use doubling with these two sets of characters?
2. What features create a sense of harmony at the end of the play?

DISCUSS

1. Do you think the closing speeches add anything to the play or would you prefer it to end with the couples going off to bed (at line 342)?
2. Many scholars think that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed at a royal wedding. Do you think this play is appropriate for such an occasion? Why or why not?

General activities

Oral presentations / performance

1. Make your own CD soundtrack for a film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Choose at least eight songs that you feel are appropriate for different scenes (or excerpts from scenes) in the film. Specify which eight scenes you have chosen and write at least 50 words on each song to say why it is appropriate for the particular scene you have chosen. Include at least four of the following scenes:
   - Act 1 Scene 2 (The mechanicals at work)
   - Act 2 Scene 1 (Enter Oberon)
   - Act 2 Scene 2 (Lullaby for Titania)
   - Act 3 Scene 1 (The mechanicals flee from a donkey)
   - Act 3 Scene 2 (Either of the fights)
   - Act 3 Scene 2 (Puck causes darkness)
   - Act 4 Scene 1 (The good life for Bottom)
   - Act 4 Scene 1 (The lovers awake)
   - Act 4 Scene 1 (Bottom's dream)
   - Act 5 Scene 1 (Thisbe mourns Pyramus' death)

   You may choose to perform this as an oral presentation, playing short excerpts from each song and explaining your choices.
2. Explain what your emphasis would be if you were given the opportunity to direct your own version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Cover in particular your choice of costume for four of the main characters and the fairies as a group. Explain what sort of atmosphere you would look to create through the set.
3. Record a scene (or an excerpt from a scene) from the play as part of a radio play.
4. Perform a scene from the play as a group or perform one of the monologues on your own.
5. Produce a one-minute trailer advertising your film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This can take the form of either a television, film or radio advertisement. Make sure you consider music, sound effects and voice-over.
6. Set up a chat-show style interview with one or more of the characters from the play, where you discuss what happened to the character(s) in a particular scene. Make sure you stay in character for the entire length of the interview.

7 Cover one of the following scenes as a news report (minimum length of two minutes), using a headline suggested below:

- A Father's Demand: Marry or Die (Act 1, Scene 2)
- Father Reports Missing Daughter (some time between Acts 1 and 4)
- Fairy News: A Royal Custody Battle (Act 2 Scene 1)
- Fairy News: Puck Mucks Up (based on events in Acts 2 and 3)
- A Monstrous Sighting (Act 3 Scene 1)
- A Triple Wedding (based on events in Acts 4 and 5)
- The Performance of *Pyramus & Thisbe* (Act 5 Scene 1)

This task can take the form of either a video or a radio news story. Make sure you capture and maintain your audience's attention, and include some interviews.

8 Deliver a speech from the play as a rap, emphasising the rhythm. You may perform it as a group or individually.

9 Memorise a passage from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and perform it for your class. Briefly place it in context before you deliver the lines, and then explain your interpretation after your performance.

10 Present a talk to your classmates entitled: 'What's so great about Shakespeare?' In your talk, you might like to discuss elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* such as the multiple plots, characters, themes and language features.

Questions for debate

Debate one of the following topics. The Affirmative Team will agree with the statement, while the Negative Team will disagree. Both teams should consist of three members, who each speak for two minutes.

1 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a battle of the sexes and Shakespeare's sympathies lie with the women.

2 Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a celebration of romantic love.

Creative writing

1 Try writing part of one of the scenes as a chapter from a modern novel. This will mean that you have to fill in some of the details of setting, incorporate dialogue into the flow of your writing, and give some idea of what characters are thinking, even in places where they do not use a soliloquy. Make sure you use modern language, and that you keep elements such as narrative voice and verb tense consistent.

2 Write a farewell letter from Hermia to her father, Egeus, explaining her decision to elope and her reasons for doing so. Use correct letter-writing conventions. You can use Shakespearean language, or modern English.

3 Write a song or poem that Lysander would have sung or recited beneath Hermia's window.

4 Write a 300–500 word newspaper article on the events listed in Question 7 under oral presentations / performances (page 148). Make sure your headline and your opening sentence grab the reader's attention. Also, include some quotes from the actual play, or fictitious interviews with characters. You might like to present this using ICT (PowerPoint, Flash, create a website etc.).

5 Script the conversation when Helena informs Demetrius of Hermia's escape (some time between Act 1 Scene 1 and Act 2 Scene 2). To do this, make sure you first analyse the language Helena and Demetrius generally employ. Also ensure you use appropriate dramatic conventions for this task.

6 Write a diary entry as one of the mechanicals, discussing your experience of Bottom's transformation in Act 3.

7 As one of the fairies, write a blog about Titania's recent, strange love for a man with the head of a donkey. Write some responses from other fairies.

8 There are very few soliloquies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Add one at a moment where you think a character should take time out to reflect. If you are unsure what soliloquies are, see page 36.

9 Write a letter that Helena might send to a relationship advice column in a magazine. As the editor, write your response to her letter.

10 Think of three alternative titles for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and write a few sentences (between 80 and 100 words on each) on why each of these titles would effectively market the play or film to a modern audience.

11 Script the conversation the lovers have in which they recount their dreams (some time between Acts 4 and 5). To do this, make sure you first analyse the language the lovers employ in Act 4. Also ensure you use Shakespearean dramatic conventions for this task.

12 Create a blog in which you write some entries from one character's point of view at different stages in the play, responding to the events that have occurred. Add other characters' comments to your character's blog.

13 Rewrite Quince's Prologue as a clear, effective and eloquent introduction to the play.

14 Write the epilogue that was never delivered at the end of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Remember to make it comically bad. You may want to read 'A word about comic language in *Pyramus and Thisbe*' on pages 129–30 to help you with this.

Illustration

1. Create a diagram representing all of the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, making clear the changing relationships and the various hierarchies.
2. Draw a labelled map of Athens and the woods outside of Athens in the style of a fantasy novel (e.g. *The Lord of the Rings* or *Monster Blood Tattoo*) or some other style.
3. Design a poster for your own film version or stage production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Include brief quotes, some phrases that will catch the viewers' attention and a list of the cast.
4. Present one of the scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a comic book or comic strip (e.g. manga).
5. Create a PowerPoint or Flash presentation on five characters in the play, using key quotes, a background that you feel is representative of each character, an appropriate symbol for them, and some background music. Write 50 words on each character, explaining why you made these creative choices.
6. Create a Facebook page for one of characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Make sure you include your character's interests, their interpretation of some of the events of the play, comments from friends and so on. See if you can include some links to appropriate music.
7. Illustrate one of Oberon's speeches as a page in a medieval book or illuminated manuscript.
8. Draw what you imagine Puck to look like, giving careful thought to costume, physical build and facial expression.

Questions for discussion

Discuss the following questions in a group or as a class.

1. Do you think Shakespeare is more sympathetic to his male or female characters?
2. Do you think *A Midsummer Night's Dream* presents a celebration of love?
3. Why do you think Shakespeare chooses to include the mechanicals in the play?
4. At what point does the audience understand *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a comedy?
5. Does Shakespeare portray Theseus and Oberon sympathetically?

6 One Shakespearean critic said that Shakespeare's comedies pit the society of youth against the older generation. To what extent do you believe this is true of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

7 What factors contribute to the peculiar atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

Essay questions

1 Discuss how *A Midsummer Night's Dream* both celebrates and ridicules love.

2 Discuss how Shakespeare uses a combination of various language and theatrical devices to make *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a masterful play.

3 Outline the devices Shakespeare employs to create comedy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

4 Can a student in the twenty-first century learn anything from studying *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

5 What language and theatrical devices does Shakespeare use to show the conflict between illusion and reality in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

6 'Above all, it is Shakespeare's language that successfully engages the reader and communicates ideas.' Discuss, with reference to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

7 How does Shakespeare use language to define character and heighten the drama of certain situations?

8 To what extent does Michael Hoffmann's film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* bring Shakespeare's play to life?

9 What role does conflict play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

10 What elements in Acts 4 and 5 help to make *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a comedy? (For a definition of comedy, see pages 108–09.)

APPENDIX 1

To the teacher

It will not be possible for your students to attempt every activity in this book, but we have given you a wide range of activities and questions, so that you can determine what best suits the particular needs of your class. Listed below are some of the features of this edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a brief explanation of how they might be useful in your lessons.

We have used a range of icons to help you and your students identify different parts of the text.

1. Understanding the narrative

Before you begin reading the text, it is important that your students have a sound grasp of the story. It is a good idea for the class to read through the **Act summaries** on pages 17–18, and complete the **Quick questions** and **Freeze-frames** activities on pages 19–20.

At the beginning of each scene, we have given a brief outline of what happens, called **In a nutshell**.

2. Reading the text

While it is likely you will read most of the play as a class, you should also read some scenes in smaller groups, and you might like to perform some as well.

At the beginning of each scene we have listed the **Characters** in order of importance. It is advisable that you take a major role and delegate the other major parts to your most confident readers. It is also helpful if one student reads the stage directions in some of the scenes.

Where possible, try to delegate parts the day before you perform a scene so that students have an opportunity to look over and perhaps practise their parts. Encourage students to read loudly and clearly, and be forthcoming with your praise where you can.

Shakespeare's language (pages 8–14) provides some basic reading tips and explanations of key language features. We recommend that you look at the reading tips with your class before you begin reading the play. It is important that you do not overwhelm your students with too many concepts in a short space of time. Introduce concepts such as iambic pentameter after your students have begun to gain an intuitive sense for the language.

We have also provided general introductions on **Elizabethan England**, **Shakespeare** himself, and the **Dates, sources and setting** of *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream. These will provide some background and a context in which to read the play. The notes on Elizabethan England and the theatre are the most important of these introductions. You could read these as a class or ask students to read them in their own time.

There is, of course, no substitute for seeing the text performed as a live production, and we recommend you have actors or performance companies visit your school.

3. Understanding the text

We have included a summary of **Important vocabulary** (page 15) as well as a short **Vocabulary list** at the beginning of each scene. All of these words, plus some others from the **Text notes**, are printed in the **Vocabulary list** on pages 157–61. In this way, you can find a word without having to remember where it was first introduced.

The **Before you read** section at the beginning of each scene provides reading tips and anticipates problems students may have. Phrases and words that are more secondary to the understanding of a scene are printed as **Text notes** beneath the play text on each page.

A number of **History boxes** present useful historical information on Elizabethan England. Most of these boxes give a historical context for specific scenes; other information has been provided to fire students' curiosity.

Finally, we have included a **Shakespeare reading list** on page 156 in case you wish to read more about Shakespeare and the Elizabethan world.

4. Analysing the text

In ordering the **Questions**, we have attempted to balance chronology against degree of difficulty. For some scenes you might look to save time by dividing the questions among different groups in the class or you may simply use them as a springboard for discussion.

We have also included challenge or **Extend** questions that will allow some students or the entire class to analyse a scene in greater depth. It is important that all students engage with the technical aspects of the play and, for this reason, we have also included questions relating to technique among the general questions.

Some questions have been designed for general discussion of personal responses to the text; these are indicated by the **Discuss** icon.

A word about …

Shakespeare's themes and techniques highlight particular ideas and devices used by Shakespeare throughout this play. We recommend that students first read these boxes themselves and that you then explain the concept using the examples.

5. The films (Press play)

Michael Hoffman's 1999 film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is easily the most accessible, exciting version of the play. It is useful to show excerpts from the film as your class studies the play to reinforce your students' understanding of key scenes, and it may serve as an alternative to reading some scenes. The **Press play** activities provide opportunities for further analysis and discussion.

6. General activities

There is deliberate overlap between the **Questions for debate**, **Questions for discussion** and **Essay questions** (pages 148–51). How you use these will depend largely on the type of class you have. We have generally found that it is better to read through the play in its entirety before beginning debates, essays or creative activities.

7. A note about the text

We have based this edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* primarily on the First Folio. There are very few scene divisions in the play and, for this reason, we have divided some of the longer scenes into two or three parts to make them more digestible for your students. Some of the stage directions and the spelling have been modernised, in line with standard editorial practices for preparing editions of Shakespeare's plays. Modern punctuation conventions are followed, with the exception of the dash (–), which we have used to indicate an interruption in the flow or the direction of the conversation; for example, when a character switches from soliloquising to addressing another character on stage, or when a character switches from addressing one character to addressing another. (See pages 9–10 for a more detailed explanation.)

8. Finally …

No-one could reasonably expect to understand every phrase or allusion in Shakespeare's plays and your students should not expect to either. Making this clear from the outset will foster the confidence in students to talk about what they do understand and what they do know: to see the text as a glass half full, rather than a glass half empty. Moreover, this will encourage students to appreciate the subtleties and resonances of the language and to truly understand that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our pedagogy.

APPENDIX 2

Two Shakespearean sonnets

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Sonnet 130

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red.
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go:
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

APPENDIX 3

A Shakespeare reading list

Alexander, Catherine MS, *Shakespeare: The Life, the Works, the Treasures*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2007.

Bate, Jonathan, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, Picador, London, 1997.

Crystal, David & Ben, *Shakespeare's Words*, Penguin, London, 2002.

Greenblatt, Stephen, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, Norton, London, 2004.

Greer, Germaine, *Shakespeare: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.

Gurr, Andrew, *The Shakespearean Stage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

Hussey, SS, *The Literary Language of Shakespeare*, Longman, Harlow, 1982.

Kay, Dennis, *Shakespeare: His Life, Work and Era*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1991.

Kermode, Frank, *Shakespeare's Language*, Penguin, London, 2001.

Kermode, Frank, *The Age of Shakespeare*, Phoenix, London, 2005.

Rodenburg, Patsy, *Reading Shakespeare*, Methuen, London, 2002.

Sandler, Robert (ed.), *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1986.

Shapiro, James, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, Faber & Faber, London, 2005.

Tillyard, EMW, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, Vintage Books, New York, 1960.

Wells, Stanley, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.

Wells, Stanley, *Shakespeare & Co.*, Penguin, London, 2007.

Wilson, Jean, *The Shakespeare Legacy*, Bramley Books, Godalming, 1995.

Wood, Michael, *In Search of Shakespeare*, directed by David Wallace, Maya Vision International, 2004.

Vocabulary list

Abate: Lessen or diminish
Abide: Endure; stay
Abjure: Give up, reject or abstain from
Aby: Pay or suffer for
Abroad: Around the place
Accent: Talk; language; quality of voice
Adieu: Goodbye (a French word)
Alack: An expression of regret, like 'Oh dear'
Aloof: Apart
Amend: Improve, adjust or alter
Amiable: Loving or tender (today this word means personable or friendly)
Amity: Friendship
Amorous: Loving or romantic
An: If
Anon: Soon
Antique: Either ancient or grotesque
Apprehension: Powers of comprehension or sharpness of mind (today it also means uneasiness)
Art: Are
Audacious: Bold; promising
Aught: Anything
Augment: Increase or add to
Aurora: The goddess of the dawn
Avaunt: Be gone
Avouch: Confirm or guarantee that something is true
Ay: Yes

Bated: (Abated) lessened or diminished
Beguile: Fool or charm
Bequeath: Hand over
Beseech: Beg or request forcefully
Beshrew: Curse
Beteem: Allow or permit
Bootless: Useless
Bounteous: Generous
Bower: Leafy shelter
Brake: Bush or thicket
Bully: Something similar to 'old mate'
By'r lakin: By our Lady (the Virgin Mary)

Cankers: Worms and caterpillars
Celestial: Heavenly
Censure: Severe criticism
Changeling: Child taken by the fairies; child believed to be substituted for another by the fairies
Chaste: Being sexually pure or avoiding sex
Chastity: Sexual purity or avoidance of sex
Chide / chid: To tell someone off or criticise them
Churl: Inconsiderate person; someone lacking manners
Clamour: Noise or outcry
Comedy: Story with a happy ending
Compel: Force
Con: To learn by heart; commit to memory
Concord: Agreement; a pleasant sound
Condoling: Moving or affecting
Confound: Confuse; destroy
Consecrate: Make sacred or set apart for holy use
Consecrated: Blessed
Constancy: Consistency; self-control
Corporal: Of the body
Counterfeit: Copy
Counsel: Advice (noun); advise (verb)

Cupid's flower: Plant that, when applied to the eyes, causes someone to fall in love with the next living creature the person sees; also known as love-in-idleness
Cur: Watch-dog

Derision: Mocking or scorn
Diana / Dian: Goddess of the moon and chastity
Dignity: Worth, nobleness or excellence
Discord: Disagreement or conflict
Discourse: Conversation (noun); talk (verb)
Discretion: Subtlety or good taste; caution
Disparage: Criticise
Dispatch: Send off to a destination
Dissension: Dispute or quarrel
Ditty: Simple, short song
Dotage: State of being in love; infatuation
Dote (on): Be in love or infatuated (with someone); can also mean to behave foolishly
Doth: Does

Eke: Also
Eloquence: Beauty and skill in writing or speech
Enamoured: In love (with)
Enmity: Hatred or a state of being enemies
Entreat: Beg or request forcefully
Epilogue: Closing speech of a play
Ere: Before
Err: Do wrong or make a mistake
Espy: See; spy
Expound: Explain; set out in detail
Eyne: Eyes

Fain: Gladly
Fancy: Imagination
Fatal: Deadly; causing death
Feigning: False or deceptive
Fell: Cruel
Fie: Expression of annoyance, disapproval or even disgust
Flattering: Pleasing
Folly: Foolishness
Fond: Foolish
Forester: The keeper of the forest
Forfeit: Loss
Forsooth: It is true; truly
Forswear: Swear falsely; reject
Fortitude: Strength
Fray: Fight

Gall: Bitterness or anger; bile; a bitter liquid produced by the gall bladder
Gallant: Splendid or grand
Gaud: Toy
Gibbet: Gallows or scaffold
Grace: Goodness or virtue (has Christian connotations)
Grooms: Male attendants (guards)
Grove: Small wood or group of trees
Guise: External appearance

Hallowed: Holy or sacred
Harbinger: Forerunner; herald
Hark: Listen; pay attention
Haste: Great speed
Hence: Away (from here)
Heresy: Religious belief or practice that contradicts the norm
Hie: Hurry or go quickly
Hind: Female deer
Hither: Here; to this place
Humour: Mood or behaviour

Impeach: Charge (noun); to accuse or discredit (verb)
Inconstant: Lacking self-control
Incorporate: United (adjective); unite (verb)
Injurious: Causing injury

Jest: Make believe; play-act
Jocund: Light-hearted or joyful
Jove: Jupiter: the chief of the Roman gods
Jovial: Happy and cheerful
Judicious: Wise

Kinsman: Relatives by blood or marriage
Knavery: Trickery

Lamentable: Sad
Languish: Pass or waste time
Lanthorn: Lantern
Lark: Small singing bird (generally associated with the morning)
Lofty: Exalted or superior
Love-in-idleness: Cupid's flower: when applied to someone's eyes it causes the person to fall love with the next living creature seen

Malevolent: Evil; having a desire to harm
Mantle: Cloak
Marr: Ruin or make bad
Marry: Expression of surprise or frustration, referring in medieval and Elizabethan times to the Virgin Mary
Marvellous: Very
Masque: Musical drama
Mechanicals: Tradesmen or manual workers
Meet: Appropriate or fitting
Melancholy: Sadness
Mend: Improve (do better next time)
Mewed: Locked up or confined
Mimic: Actor
Mirth: Merriment or laughter
Misprision: Error
Moderately: With restraint
Mortal: Human; those who will one day die (as opposed to immortal)
Mounsieur: Mr (a French gentleman)

Nativity: Birth
Naught: Nothing
Nuptial: Relating to marriage or a wedding
Nymph: Beautiful girl (in mythology, a goddess associated with trees, rivers and mountains)

Oath: Promise
Officious: Interfering or meddlesome
Orbs: Circles
Overbear: To defeat with something of superior weight or strength

Palpable: Able to be touched or felt; tangible
Paragon: Model of perfection
Paramour: Lover
Partition: Separation; wall
Pat: Punctually or on time
Patches: Clowns
Peradventure: Perhaps
Perchance: Maybe
Perforce: By force
Peril: At risk of punishment
Pernicious: Wicked or deadly
Pert: Lively
Portentous: Serious; a sign that something bad is going to happen
Potent: Powerful
Predominant: Of great importance

Prithee: Used to introduce a request
Prodigious: Ominous; hinting at some unfortunate future
Progeny: Offspring (children)
Prologue: Spoken introduction to a play
Prosperity: Wealth
Pumps: Light shoes for dancing
Purge: Cleanse or clear

Rash: Reckless
Ravished: Abducted or carried off by force; raped
Rebuke: Insult or tell off
Recompense: Pay or reward for help
Recreant: Coward
Relish: Enjoy or delight in
Remedy: Help or relief
Repose: Rest
Reprehend: Criticise
Resolute: Firm in purpose or belief
Revels: Celebrations or festivities
Rote (by rote): Repeating back (from memory)
Roundel: Circular dance
Rude: Uneducated (referring to the tradesmen)

Satire: Literary work that ridicules human behaviour and institutions
Saucy: Cheeky or rude
Scorn: Mock or jeer; express contempt or disgust
Shrewd: Nasty or harmful; today it generally means clever or calculating
Soft: Expression of surprise
Sojourn: Journey or rest
Solemnity: Celebration or festivity
Solemnly: Ceremoniously (this word suggested joy and pleasure in Shakespeare's day)
Sooth: True; truly
Sport: Recreation or entertainment
Spurn: Hurt or knock; scornful rejection
Surfeit: Feed to excess or over-indulge (verb); over-indulgence (noun)
Swoon: Fall into a fainting fit

Tapers: Candles
Tarry: Stay or stick around
Tartar: Person from central Asia
Tedious: Causing fatigue or boredom; long-winded; painful
Thence: From that place (or time)
Thine: Yours (something belonging to you)
Thither: To or towards that place
Thorough: Archaic word for through
Thou: You
Thy: Your
Tiring-housing: Dressing room
Transpose: Change, transform or convert
Troth: Truth
Tyrant: Unjust or cruel ruler

Upbraid: Scold or criticise

Valiant: Brave or heroic
Valour: Bravery; courage
Venturous: Adventurous
Vestal: Woman vowed to chastity
Vexation: The state of being worried or troubled
Virtues: Good qualities
Virtuous: Showing good or fine qualities; powerful
Visage: Someone's face or facial expression
Votaress: Woman under a vow; a nun

Waggish: Playful; mischievous
Wane: Decrease gradually in size or strength; fade
Wanton: Carefree or irresponsible, lively or obscene (adjective); to play or frolic (verb)
Whence: From what place, cause or origin
Wherefore: Why
Wit: Cleverness (especially with humour)
Withal: With or in addition to; in spite of that
Woo: Win over or persuade (in matters of love)
Wot: Learn, know or be told
Wrath: Anger
Wrought: Worked

Yield: Give in
Yonder: Over there

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