a midsummer night's dream

Teacher handbook
This Teacher Handbook grew out of a team effort of teachers past and present, Chicago Shakespeare Theater artists, interns, educators, and scholars. Interns Rebecca Duman, Samuel Evola and Julie Strassel revised a previous edition of A Midsummer Night's Dream handbook for this production. Chicago Shakespeare Theater gratefully acknowledges the groundbreaking and indelible work of Dr. Rex Gibson and the Cambridge School Shakespeare Series, and The Folger Shakespeare Institute, whose contributions to the field of teaching have helped shape our own work through the years.

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Welcome to the woods just beyond the gates of the city, where one small flower can kindle love—or just kill it.

As wanderers here, we feel hopeless and alone one moment and, in the next, surrounded by creatures only our imagination can conjure. We may forget who we are. We may turn on our best friend. Or, most unimaginable of all, fall head-over-heels in love with, well, an ass…

The forest is strange, terrifying—and beautiful. It can be life-changing.

The fairy king and queen who reign here are currently locked in a marital battle—which happen to be disrupting the entire natural world in the process. Shakespeare invites us along, bringing no other luggage than our own imaginative powers.

Get ready for a wild ride. ✷
Art That Lives

Drama is a living art. It is written to be performed live before a group of people who form an audience and together experience a play. Cave paintings depicting men disguised as animals reveal that since ancient times, impersonation and imitation have served humans in their efforts to express themselves and to communicate. The drama of western civilization has its roots in the ancient Greeks’ religious rituals and observances.

Until the Renaissance, when Shakespeare wrote, drama was closely tied to religious beliefs and practice. Drama not only depicts human communication, it is human communication. In theater, unlike television or film, there is a two-way communication that occurs between the actors and their audience. The audience hears and sees the actors, and the actors hear and see the audience. We are used to thinking about the actors’ roles in a play, but may find it strange to imagine ourselves, the audience, playing an important role in this living art. Because the art lives, each production is guaranteed to be different, depending in part upon an audience’s response. Live drama is the sharing of human experience, intensely and immediately, in the theater, which momentarily becomes our universe.

A live theater production depends upon its audience. The best performances depend upon the best actors—and the best audiences. When the actors sense a responsive, interested audience, their work is at its best—full of animation and energy. When the actors sense disinterest, they too are distracted and the play they create is less interesting. One actor described the experience of live performance as a story told by the actors and audience together. In this sense, you are also a storyteller in the experience of live theater. We hope you’ll enjoy your role—and will help us to give you a dramatic experience that you’ll always remember.

[Theatrical performance] is essentially a sociable, communal affair. This is important. To resist this is, I think, to ruin one of the very important parts of the theatrical experience. Let the play and let the fact that temporarily you are not your private self, but a member of a closely fused group, make it easy for the performance to ‘take you out of yourself.’ This, I suggest, is the object of going to a play...to be taken out of yourself, out of your ordinary life, away from the ordinary world of everyday.

—TYRONE GUTHRIE, 1962

How can you help us give you the best performance we can?

- Please, no talking during the performance. It distracts the actors as well as the people sitting nearby.
- Respond naturally to our play. Emotions are part of drama. We hope that you’ll laugh, cry and even gasp—but as a natural response to the story, and not in order to distract attention from the stage.
- Please leave all “noisemakers”—food, gum, cell phones, iPods, etc.—back at school or on the bus. In a quiet theater, wrappers and munching are heard by all, the actors included.
- No photographs of any kind, please. Flashbulbs can make the actors lose their focus and can be dangerous. Digital cameras, along with all other kinds of recording devices, are prohibited, as is text-messaging.

Bard’s Bio

The exact date of William Shakespeare’s birth is not known, but his baptism, traditionally three days after a child’s birth, was recorded on April 26, 1564. His father John Shakespeare was a tanner, glover, grain dealer and prominent town official of the thriving market town of Stratford-upon-Avon. His mother Mary Arden was the daughter of a prosperous, educated farmer. Though the records are lost, Shakespeare undoubtedly attended Stratford’s grammar school, where he would have acquired some knowledge of Latin and Greek and the classical writers. There is no record that Shakespeare acquired a university education of any kind. Some skeptical scholars have raised doubts about whether Shakespeare, due to his relatively average level of education and humble origins, could have possibly written what has long been considered the best verse drama composed in the English language. But not until 1769, 150 years after Shakespeare’s death, did these theories arise—and, to all appearances, Shakespeare’s contemporaries and immediate successors never seemed to question whether William Shakespeare wrote the celebrated works attributed to him.
At eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. They had one daughter Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet, Shakespeare’s only son, died at age eleven. From 1585, the year in which the twins were baptized, until 1592, when he is first referred to as a dramatist in London, we know nothing of Shakespeare’s life. Consequently, these seven so-called “lost years” are filled with legend and conjecture. We may never know what brought Shakespeare to London or how he entered its world of theater. The first reference to Shakespeare as an actor and playwright appears in 1592 and was made by Robert Greene, a rival playwright and pamphleteer, who attacked Shakespeare as an “upstart crow” for presuming to write plays (when he was only a mere actor) and copying the works of established dramatists.

Subsequent references to Shakespeare indicate that as early as 1594 he was not only an actor and playwright, but also a partner in a new theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, which soon became one of London’s two principal companies. The company’s name changed to the King’s Men in 1603 with the accession of James I, and it endured until the Commonwealth closed the theaters in 1642. Beginning in 1599 the company acted primarily at the Globe playhouse, in which Shakespeare held a one-tenth interest.

During his career of approximately twenty years, Shakespeare wrote or collaborated on what most scholars now agree upon as thirty-eight plays. His earliest plays, including Love’s Labor’s Lost, The Comedy of Errors, Richard III, King John and The Taming of the Shrew, were written between 1589 and 1594. Between 1594 and 1599, Shakespeare wrote both Romeo and Juliet and Julius Caesar as well as other plays, including Richard II, The Merchant of Venice and As You Like It. His great tragedies, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth, were composed between 1599 and 1607, and were preceded by his last play traditionally categorized as comedy, Measure for Measure. The earlier histories, comedies and tragedies made way for Shakespeare’s final dramatic form—the so-called “romances,” which were written between 1606 and 1611 and include Cymbeline, Pericles, The Winter’s Tale and The Tempest. These were the plays of a playwright no longer bound by the constraints of his earlier historical and tragic forms.

Shakespeare seldom devised his own plots for his plays, but creatively borrowed here and there from histories, prose romances, poems, and plays of his own and others. Shakespeare was an ingenious dramatic artist with a vast imagination. He created masterpieces out of conventional and unpromising material.

In Shakespeare’s time, ancient stories were told and re-told. The important thing was not the originality of the plot but how the story was told. In the telling of a story, there are few writers who rival Shakespeare in theatricality, poetry and depth of character. By 1592 Shakespeare had emerged as a rising playwright in London, where he continued to enjoy fame and financial success as an actor, playwright and part-owner of London’s leading theater company for nearly twenty years. Shakespeare retired in 1611 to live as a country gentleman in Stratford, his birthplace, until his death on April 23, 1616.

Shakespeare was the man, who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there.

—John Dryden, 1688
Shakespeare’s First Folio took five “compositors” two and one-half years to print. The compositors manually set each individual letter of type by first memorizing the text line by line. There was no editor overseeing the printing, and the compositors frequently altered punctuation and spelling. Errors caught in printing would be corrected, but due to the prohibitively high cost of paper, earlier copies remained intact. Of the 1,200 copies of the First Folio that were printed, approximately 230 survive today, each slightly different. Chicago’s Newberry Library contains an original First Folio in its rich collections.

Chicago Shakespeare Theater utilizes the First Folio as the basis for its playscripts. Its punctuation gives clues to actors about what words to emphasize and about what ideas are important. In Shakespeare’s own theater company, with only a few days to rehearse each new play, these built-in clues were essential. Today they still help actors make the language easier to break apart—even though you’re hearing language that’s 400 years “younger” than ours.

A key to understanding Shakespeare’s language is to appreciate the attitude toward speech accepted by him and his contemporaries. Speech was traditionally and piously regarded as God’s final and consummate gift to man. Speech was thus to Elizabethans a source of enormous power for good or ill... Hence the struggle to excel in eloquent utterance.

—DavId BevinGton, 1980

Shakespeare’s England

Elizabeth I ruled England for forty-five years from 1558 to 1603 in a time of relative prosperity and peace. “Few monarchs,” says Shakespearean scholar David Bevington, “have ever influenced an age so pervasively and left their stamp on it so permanently.”

The daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth was regarded by many Catholics as an illegitimate child—and an illegitimate monarch. The politics of religion constantly threatened Elizabeth’s reign, even though it was one of the most secure that England had known for hundreds of years.

Elizabeth had no heir, and throughout her reign the politics of succession posed a real threat to the nation’s peace—and provided a recurrent subject of Shakespeare’s plays. While Shakespeare was writing Julius Caesar, the Earl of Essex, one of the Queen’s favorite courtiers, rebelled against her government. Shakespeare’s portrayal of the forced abdication of a king in Richard II was censored in performance during Elizabeth’s reign.

Elizabethan England was a smaller, more isolated country than it had been previously or would be subsequently. It had withdrawn from its extensive empire on the Continent, and its explorations of the New World had barely begun. There was a period of internal economic development as Elizabeth ignored the counsel of her advisors and kept out of war until the attempted invasion by Spain and the Great Armada in 1588. England’s economy was still based in agriculture, and its farmers were poor and embittered by strife with rich landowners who “enclosed” what was once the farmers’ cropland for pastures. Uprisings and food riots were commonplace in the rural area surrounding Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare grew up.

London, then the largest city of Europe, was a city of contrasts: the richest and the poorest of England lived there, side by side. While many bettered themselves in a developing urban economy, unemployment was a serious problem. It was a time of change and social mobility. For the first time in English history, a rising middle class aspired to the wealth and status of the aristocracy.

Under Elizabeth, England returned to Protestantism. But in her masterful style of accommodation and compromise, she incorporated an essentially traditional and Catholic doctrine into an Episcopal form of church government that was ruled by
the Crown and England’s clergy rather than by Rome’s Pope. Extremists on the religious right and left hated her rule and wanted to see Elizabeth overthrown. She was declared a heretic by Rome in 1569, and her life was endangered.

“Her combination of imperious will and femininity and her brilliant handling of her many contending male admirers have become legendary,” says David Bevington, and resulted in a monarchy that remained secure in the face of religious and political threats from many sides. In choosing not to marry, Elizabeth avoided allying herself and her throne with a foreign country or an English faction which might threaten her broad base of power and influence.

Throughout Early Modern Europe, governments were centralized, assuming the power that once belonged to city-states and feudal lords. The rule of monarchs like Queen Elizabeth I was absolute. She and her subjects viewed the monarch as God’s deputy, and the divine right of kings was a cherished doctrine (and became the subject of Shakespeare’s history plays). It was this doctrine that condemned rebellion as an act of disobedience against God but could not protect Elizabeth from rebellion at home, even from her closest advisors or from challenges from abroad.

Childless, Elizabeth I died in 1603. The crown passed to her cousin James VI, King of Scotland, who became England’s King James I. Ruling from 1603 to 1625 (Shakespeare died in 1616), James I was responsible for overseeing the creation of a new bible, which in its powerful cadence and poetry would remain a legacy of this fertile time, just as Shakespeare’s canons have. But his reign was troubled with political and religious controversy. It would be James’s son, Charles I, who was beheaded in the English civil wars of the 1640s for tyrannically abusing what he believed was his divinely ordained power.

Shakespeare and his fellow actors managed to secure both. They provided popular entertainment at Queen Elizabeth’s court as the Lord Chamberlain’s Men and continued to enjoy court patronage after King James I came to the throne in 1603, when they became the King’s Men. Their success at court gave Shakespeare and his fellow shareholders in the Lord Chamberlain’s company the funds to build the Globe playhouse in 1599. The Globe joined a handful of other theaters located just out of the city’s jurisdiction as one of the first public theaters in England.

Shakespeare may have developed his love for the theater by watching traveling acting troupes temporarily transform the courtyard of an inn or town square into a theater. When he was a boy growing up in Stratford-upon-Avon, acting troupes traveled around the countryside in flatbed, horsedrawn carts, which did triple duty as transportation, stage and storage for props and costumes. Their horses pulled the cart into an inn yard or the courtyard of a country estate or college. People gathered around to watch, some leaning over the rails from the balconies above to view the action on the impromptu stage below.

Many of these traveling performances staged religious stories, enacting important scenes from the Bible—the form of theater that endured throughout the Middle Ages. During the Renaissance, the enacted stories became more secular. Public
officials scorned the theater as immoral and frivolous. The theaters just outside London’s walls came to be feared as places where physical, moral and social corruption spread. The authorities frequently shut them down during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the city was menaced by the plague or by political and social rioting. When the theaters were open, the Master of the Revels had to read and approve every word in a new play. The show could not go on until he gave his permission.

All kinds of people came to plays at the Globe, and they came in great numbers. A full house in the Globe numbered about 3,000 people. Though the same dimensions as the original structure, the reconstruction of the Globe holds 1,500 at maximum capacity—an indication of just how close those 3,000 people must have been to one another. They arrived well before the play began to meet friends, drink ale and snack on the refreshments sold at the lays. An outing to the theater might take half the day. It was more like tailgating at a football game, or going with friends to a rock concert, than our experience of attending theater today.

Affluent patrons paid two to three pence or more for gallery seats (like the two levels of balcony seating at Chicago Shakespeare Theater) while the “common folk”—shopkeepers and artisans—stood for a penny, about a day’s wages for a skilled worker. They were a diverse and demanding group, and Shakespeare depicted characters and situations that appealed to every cross-section of Renaissance society. The vitality and financial success of the Elizabethan theater is without equal in English history.

There was no electricity for lighting, so all plays were performed in daylight. Sets and props were bare and basic. A throne, table or bed had to be brought on stage during the action since Elizabethan plays were written to be performed without scene breaks or intermissions. When the stage directions for Macbeth indicate that “a banquet is prepared,” the stage keepers prepared the banquet in full view of the audience. From what scholars can best reconstruct about performance conventions, Shakespeare’s plays were performed primarily in “modern” dress—that is, the clothes of Shakespeare’s time—regardless of their historical setting. The actors wore the same clothes on the stage as their contemporaries wore on the street. Hand-me-downs from the English aristocracy provided the elegant costumes for the play’s royalty.

Most new plays had short runs and were seldom revived. The acting companies were always in rehearsal for new shows but, due to the number of ongoing and upcoming productions, most plays were rehearsed for just a few days.

It was not until 1660 that women would be permitted to act on the English stage. Female roles were performed by boys or young men. Elaborate Elizabethan and Jacobean dresses disguised a man’s shape and the young actors were readily accepted as “women” by the audience.

In 1642 the Puritans succeeded in closing the theaters altogether. They did not reopen until the English monarchy was restored and Charles II came to the throne in 1660. A number of theaters, including the Globe, were not open very long before the Great Fire of London destroyed them in 1666. During the eighteen years of Commonwealth rule, years when the English theaters were closed, many of the traditions of playing Shakespeare were lost.

The new theater of the Restoration approached Shakespeare’s plays very differently, rewriting and adapting his original scripts to suit the audience’s contemporary tastes. It is left to scholars of Early Modern English drama to reconstruct the traditions of Elizabethan theater from clues left behind.

chicago style Theater

Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s unique performance space reflects elements of both the first public playhouses in London and the courtyards of inns-turned-theaters, in which the young Shakespeare might first have acquired his love of the stage.

The interior of the Globe playhouse, opened in 1599, was simple and similar to that of Chicago Shakespeare Theater—a raised platform for the stage surrounded by an open, circular area with three galleries, one above the other. Both theaters use a thrust stage with an open performance area upstage; basically, the entire performance space is in the shape of a capital “T.” The audience sits on three sides of the thrust stage, so the play is staged in the middle of the audience—much like the Elizabethan Swan theater’s design, for which a traveler’s careful sketch still remains. This immersion of the stage and the action performed on it creates
a three-dimensional theater that demands three-dimensional directing, acting and design elements.

The people sitting in the side seats have the closest interaction with the performers and the performers with them. The play unfolds between the audience members seated along the sides, and the actors draw upon the responses of the audience (laughter, gasps, nervous shifting in chairs when tension mounts) as they perform.

As an audience member, your facial expressions and body language serve both as the focal point of the actors’ energy and the backdrop for the other audience members seated across from you. Architect David Taylor and his company, Theatre Projects Consultants, worked closely with Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s leadership to design this courtyard theater. “It’s important that we don’t lose the performer among the faces, but it’s essential to understand that every single face is a live piece of scenery reflecting and framing what’s going on,” Taylor explains. “That’s the reason why the courtyard theater shape is such a wonderful historical springboard for modern theater design.”

“The backdrop and the scenery for Shakespeare is the human race,” Taylor notes, “so we’re putting Shakespeare into its proper context by making human faces the backdrop for those sitting in any seat in the theater.” According to Taylor, “this close, close relationship with the performers on stage is the very essence of the courtyard experience. The courtyard experience was about leaning out of windows. It was about throwing open the windows in the courtyard when the stage was brought through on a cart and leaning out and interacting.” Audience members seated in the galleries at Chicago Shakespeare Theater are encouraged to use the “leaning rails” to watch the players below—like those watching from an inn’s balconies centuries ago when a traveling troupe set up its temporary stage.

The actors and the audience share the experience of seeing and interacting with one another. Taylor thinks that actors benefit tremendously from the courtyard design: “They’re not looking at people sitting in straight rows, disconnected from everybody around them in big seats. There’s a sense of community in the space, a sense of embracing the performer on stage.” Actors are always fed by the energy generated from their audience. The design of Chicago Shakespeare Theater offers a feast of feedback to the actors on its stage. Other theaters have been modeled upon the Elizabethan experience of courtyard theater, perhaps most notably the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Swan served as a model for Chicago Shakespeare Theater. With their deep thrust stages, both were designed to create an intimate relationship between actors and audience. Prominent architectural elements in both theaters are the brick walls that surround the audience and natural wood that creates a feeling of warmth. Brick is an aesthetic choice but, due to its particular design, it also serves as an acoustical choice. The angle of the bricks in the side walls helps diffuse sound, sending it in different directions throughout the theater. The sound, lighting and rigging systems are all state-of-the-art. Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s design accommodates a wide array of possibilities for structuring and using the performance space.

Shakespearean theater is about people. As Taylor describes the experience, “You’re the scenery. You’re the special effects. And the people you see performing this play are performing it in front, and out of, you.”

CST for $20

Chicago Shakespeare is committed to making our productions accessible for everyone, so CST for $20 was designed to fit the budget of students. We have allocated thousands of tickets across the entire season, giving our friends under 35 the opportunity to see world-class theater at an everyday price. Anyone under 35 can buy up to two $20 tickets per production. You and your students will be receiving information on CST for $20 when you come to the Theater.

You can find out more at www.chicagoshakes.com/cst20
On the Road: A Brief History of Touring Shakespeare

A wandering minstrel I, a thing of rags and patches, of ballads, songs, and snatches of dreamy lullaby...

—Gilbert & Sullivan, The Mikado

Another op’nin, another show, in Philly, Boston, or Baltimore; a chance for stage folks to say hello, another op’nin of another show.

—Cole Porter, Kiss Me, Kate

The actors are come hither, my lord...The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individual, or poem unlimited.

—William Shakespeare, Hamlet

No one knows for certain where or when theater began, but from what historians can tell, touring was a part of theater almost from the beginning. Theater has always required an audience, and it’s still true that if the audience can’t get to the theater, the theater will go to its audience. And though working in the theater is often full of uncertainties, anyone who does is sure to travel, and likely to tour. Tours can be as large as productions like The Phantom of the Opera, or as small as a juggler who wanders around the city, clubs in hand. The traveling lifestyle is so strongly associated with actors that many of them refer to themselves as gypsies; the word fits them as they wander about from show to show, going wherever their work takes them.

As early as the second century BC, companies of actors traveled the Roman Empire, setting up temporary stages at carnivals or in market squares. Audiences circa 190 BC were apparently just as particular—or perhaps more so—as those today: if the performance did not live up to their expectations, the audience would simply wander away. The following excerpt from Plautus’s prologue to the play Poenulus, is more than 2,000 years old, though some of it is still considered proper “audience etiquette” today:

Let...the usher [not] roam about in front of people or show anyone to a seat while the actor is on the stage. Those who have had a long leisurely nap at home should now cheerfully stand, or at least refrain from sleeping... And let the nurses keep tiny children at home and not bring them to see the play, lest...the children die of hunger or cry for food like young goats. Let matrons view the play in silence, laugh in silence, refrain from tinkling tones of chatter...

As time went on and the Catholic Church became more powerful, plays were forbidden—especially Greek or Roman ones that the Church felt promoted pagan beliefs. Eventually the only professional performers left were minstrels wandering from town to town. Acting was equated with sin, and actors were outcasts from society. But the desire to engage in performance seems to be a universal one, and soon enough the Church itself instigated the creation of a type of play that contemporary scholars regard as a basis of modern theater: the medieval miracle, or mystery play (from mystère, the French word for miracle). Based on the Bible, the plays (most often done in a cycle) depicted such famous stories as Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Ark, the Nativity, the Loaves and Fishes, and, finally, the story of Jesus’ death, called the Passion Play.

Versions of the medieval Passion Play are still performed today. The mystery plays were a part of church ritual and reinforced its teaching. The players would set up stages throughout a village and the townspeople would wander from stage to stage until they had seen the whole cycle. With some cycles, this could start early in the morning and last until it was too dark for the audience to see. As time went on, the sets became more elaborate. Many were placed on horse-drawn wagons, so that they would not need reconstructing in each town. Some wagons carried structures of two or more stories, and required four horses to pull them!

The mystery plays (with a few exceptions) did not have developed characters or plots, but their popularity led to stagings of new works, called “morality plays,” which depicted the common man in allegorical situations ranging from religious to political to comic. Characters in these plays had names such as “Despair” or “Divine Correction.” The morality plays made way for new theatrical forms, and once again small companies of actors wandered about Europe, performing for anyone who could pay.

The stigma of sin that the Church had placed on secular entertainment was a long time in wearing off, and even in Shakespeare’s day Queen Elizabeth declared all actors to be vagabonds (and thus without civil rights) unless they had a patron in the nobility. Shakespeare’s company was known as the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, and during King James’s rule (Elizabeth’s successor), as the King’s Men. These sponsored companies performed at the courts of their patrons, at the new public theaters such as the Globe, and, like companies today, did tours of the country.

The very real threat of plague—associated at that time with large gathering places—closed the London theaters for weeks and sometimes many months on end; during these periods,
the acting companies simply packed up and returned to the road. Traveling from town to town, the troupe would pull its cart into a town square or the courtyard of an inn. Their wagon transformed into a stage, the actors performed to all who gathered around the makeshift stage.

With theater’s resurgence in the Renaissance came playwrights, such as Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and Molière—men who wrote plays whose popularity long outlasted their own lives. Theater was again a vital element of culture, so strong that when the Puritans shut down the theaters in the seventeenth century they stayed closed for eighteen years—as opposed to the six centuries accomplished by the Church’s opposition in the Middle Ages. Although touring companies were still popular in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, especially in Italy and Spain, some plays could not tour because of the fast-growing taste for elaborate sets that could not easily be moved. Directors and designers experimented with realistic design elements that were, at the very least, impractical for touring—real sheep in a pastoral play, for instance, or rain falling on stage in a storm scene.

Shakespeare’s works delighted directors and designers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the plays were full of shipwrecks, apparitions, battles and country scenes, which gave them opportunities to create larger and more complicated sets and special effects. The results must have been astounding, but it was not unusual for the plays to be cut, rewritten, or rearranged to suit the needs of the set and the demands of the audience. Romeo and Juliet, for example, was rewritten by at least four different people in various ways. In some versions the lovers did not die, in others they exchange last words as they died; there were some versions that created lengthy funeral processions at the end of the play. More elaborate sets required more time to move, and so “two hours’ traffic of the stage” could easily become much longer as the audience waited through the set changes.

The move back to Shakespeare’s text as written was a gradual one, and it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that attempts were made to stage his plays as they are thought to have been staged during his lifetime. An English director named William Poel was instrumental in this "back to basics" Shakespeare. The emphasis in Poel’s directing was on language, and on simple staging, which allowed the plays to emerge through the word rather than the scenery. Poel encouraged his actors to speak Shakespeare’s language conversationally, as they spoke in modern plays. He moved away from the declamatory style of nineteenth-century productions—in which the delivery of the lines could be as plodding as the long set-changes—and created instead simple, elegant Shakespearean productions.

The new emphasis on language rather than spectacle gave the audience much more of a stake in the work being performed. Their feelings for the characters and situations in the play were reliant on how well they understood what was going on, and thus by how well the actors did their jobs. Will an audience understand that Phoebe in As You Like It is a shepherdess even if she has no sheep with her, or is not dressed in a traditional shepherdess costume? In King Lear, can the actors playing Lear and the Fool be at the mercy of the elements even if the storm is evoked by no more than the occasional sound cue of thunder? That, of course, depends on the skill of the actors and director—and the audience’s willingness to use their imaginations.

Every year, Chicago Shakespeare Theater also goes on tour. More in line with the traveling acting troupes of Shakespeare’s day and not as elaborate as a national touring show, our abridged Shakespeare production tours for five weeks around the tri-state area. The full cast, accompanied by a crew of light and sound operators, a dresser, and stage managers, brings Shakespeare to dozens of communities, giving them the opportunity to share in this centuries-old part of the theater experience.

The last century has seen glorious achievements in movies and television, but going to the movies is a purely reactive experience for its audience: even if everyone in the cinema were to get up and leave, the film continues to play. Theater, however, is impossible without an audience, and no matter how many times one sees the same production, no two performances will ever be the same. The excitement of theater lies in that indefinable connection between playwright, director, actor, and playgoer. This sense of connection is vital to touring productions, which typically rely on less elaborate sets, lights, and costumes. Actors in touring productions have nothing up their sleeves. They must use the play, themselves, and the audience to create magic.
TIMELINE

1300

1326 Founding of universities at Oxford and Cambridge

1348 Boccaccio’s Decameron

1349 Bubonic Plague kills one-third of England’s population

1387 Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales

1400

ca. 1440 Johannes Gutenberg invents printing press

1472 Dante’s Divine Comedy first printed

1492 Christopher Columbus lands at Cuba

1497 Vasco da Gama sails around Cape of Good Hope

1500

1501-4 Michelangelo’s David sculpture

1503 Leonardo da Vinci’s Mona Lisa

1512 Copernicus’ Commentariolus published, theorizing that Earth and other planets revolve around sun

1518 License to import 4,000 African slaves to Spanish American colonies granted to Lorenz de Gomimont

1519 Ferdinand Magellan’s trip around the world

1519 Conquest of Mexico by Cortez

1522 Luther’s translation of the New Testament

1525

1531 Henry VIII recognized as Supreme Head of the Church of England

1533 Henry VIII secretly marries Anne Boleyn, and is excommunicated by Pope

1539 Hernando de Soto explores Florida

1540 G.L. de Cardenas “discovers” Grand Canyon

1541 Hernando de Soto “discovers” the Mississippi

1550

1558 Coronation of Queen Elizabeth I

1562 John Hawkins begins slave trade between Guinea and West Indies

1564 Birth of William Shakespeare and Galileo

1565 Pencils first manufactured in England

1570 Pope Pius V excommunicates Queen Elizabeth

1573 Francis Drake sees the Pacific Ocean

1575

1576 Mayor of London forbids theatrical performances in the City

1577 Burbage erects first public theater in England

1580 Essays of Montaigne published

1582 Marriage license issued for William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway

Daughter Susanna Shakespeare christened

Shakespeare’s Plays

ca. 1592-1595

Comedies

Love’s Labor’s Lost

The Comedy of Errors

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

* A Midsummer Night’s Dream

The Taming of the Shrew

Histories

1, 2, 3 Henry VI

Richard III

King John

Tragedies

Titus Andronicus

Romeo and Juliet

The Sonnets

probably written in this period
TIMELINE

ca. 1596–1600

Comedies
The Merchant of Venice
Much Ado About Nothing
The Merry Wives of Windsor
As You Like It
Twelfth Night

Histories
Richard II
1.2 Henry IV
Henry V

Tragedies
Julius Caesar

ca. 1601–1609

Comedies
Troilus and Cressida
All’s Well That Ends Well

Tragedies
Hamlet
Othello
King Lear
Macbeth
Antony and Cleopatra
Timon of Athens
Coriolanus
Measure for Measure

ca. 1609–1613

Romances
Pericles
Cymbeline
The Winter’s Tale
The Tempest
The Two Noble Kinsmen

Histories
Henry VIII

1600

1585 Christening of son Hamnet and twin Judith
1587 Mary Queen of Scots executed
1588 Destruction of the Spanish Armada
1592 Shakespeare listed with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men
1593-4 Plague closes London playhouses for 20 months
1595 Coat of arms granted to Shakespeare’s father, John
1596 Death of son Hamnet, age 11
  Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*
1597 Shakespeare, one of London’s most successful playwrights,
  buys New Place, one of the grandest houses in Stratford-upon-Avon
1599 Globe Theatre opens, as home to the Lord Chamberlain’s Men,
  with Shakespeare as part-owner

1602 Oxford University’s Bodleian Library opens
1603 Death of Queen Elizabeth, coronation of James I
  Lord Chamberlain’s Men become the King’s Men upon endorsement of James I
1603-11 Plague closes London playhouses for at least 68 months (nearly 6 years)
1605 *Cervantes’ Don Quixote Part 1* published
1607 Marriage of Susanna Shakespeare to Dr. John Hall
  Founding of Jamestown, Virginia, first English settlement on
  American mainland
1608 *A true relation of such Occurances and Accidents of Note as hath passed
  in Virginia* by John Smith
  Galileo constructs astronomical telescope
1609 Blackfriars Theatre, London’s first commercial indoor theater,
  becomes winter home of the King’s Men
1611 “King James Version” of the Bible published
1613 Globe Theatre destroyed by fire
1614 Globe Theatre rebuilt
1615 Galileo faces the Inquisition for the first time
1616 Judith Shakespeare marries Thomas Quinney
  Death of William Shakespeare, age 52
1618 Copernican system condemned by Roman Catholic Church
1619 First African slaves arrive in Virginia
1623 The First Folio, the first compiled text of Shakespeare’s complete works published

1625

1625 James I dies, succeeded by Charles I
1633 Galileo recants before the Inquisition
1636 Harvard College founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts
1642 Civil War in England begins
1642 Puritans close theaters throughout England until following the Restoration
  of the Monarchy, 18 years later, with Charles II
1649 Charles I beheaded
1649 Commonwealth declared
A Midsummer Night’s Dream • 2013

Dramatis Personae

The Court
THESEUS Duke of Athens
HIPPOLYTA Queen of the Amazons, betrothed to Theseus
EGEUS a nobleman and father to Hermia
HERMIA in love with Lysander
LYSANDER in love with Hermia
DEMETRIUS in love with Hermia (and her father’s choice)
HELENA in love with Demetrius
PHILOSTRATE Master of the Revels at Theseus’s court

The Fairies
OBERON King of the Fairies
TITANIA Queen of the Fairies
PUCK (aka Robin Goodfellow) attendant to Oberon
PEASEBLOSSOM attendant to Titania
COBWEB attendant to Titania
MOTH attendant to Titania
MUSTARDSEED attendant to Titania
CHANGELING BOY a mortal

The Mechanicals
PETER QUINCE a carpenter (director of “Pyramus and Thisbe”)
NICK BOTTOM a weaver (Pyramus)
FRANCIS FLUTE a bellows-mender (Thisbe)
TOM SNIOUT a tinker (Wall)
SNUG a joiner (Lion)
ROBIN STARVELING a tailor (Moonshine)

Sketches by Costume Designer Melissa Torchia for CST’s 2014 Production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.
The Story

After what you might call a less-than-perfect courtship, Theseus, Duke of Athens, anticipates his marriage to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons—someone he has just conquered in battle. Theseus isn’t the only one facing romantic obstacles. A nobleman named Egeus approaches the Duke with a problem of his own. His daughter Hermia refuses to marry Demetrius, his choice and is in love with Lysander. The Duke answers Egeus’s suit by giving Hermia three choices: she must marry Demetrius, live as a nun, or die. Instead, she decides on a fourth course of action: to flee the city with Lysander. Little does she know that Demetrius will follow in hot pursuit. And where Demetrius goes, so goes Hermia’s lovesick best friend, Helena…

Into the woods they head, where the fairy king and queen are having relationship problems of their own. Infuriated by his wife Titania’s devotion to a young human boy, Oberon commands his fairy servant Puck to retrieve the magic flower that makes its victim adore the first creature she sees—whatever that may be… Then, observing Helena pursue Demetrius through the woods, Oberon takes pity and tells Puck to also enchant the young Athenian man with the flower’s juice. Unfortunately, from Puck’s point of view, one Athenian looks like another, and soon it’s Lysander and not Demetrius who falls for Helena. Hermia is not amused.

Also in the woods that night is a troupe of amateur actors, rehearsing a play that they hope to perform on the Duke’s wedding day. Among this motley crew, it takes no time for Puck to pinpoint Bottom as a perfect love match for Titania, who will awake to dote upon this mortal—transformed into an ass. Love all around seems destined for disaster. Puck’s handiwork, beginning to end—until Oberon steps back in to set things aright… ♦

Who’s Who: What’s in a Name?

Characters, just like people, are rarely named by accident. Maybe someone you know is named after his grandparent. Perhaps she is named after a family friend or someone their parents admired. Or maybe he has a name that is completely unique to him. Just as parents choose names for their children, Shakespeare named his characters so that his audiences would know something about them before they said a single line.

Here are some of the characters from A Midsummer Night’s Dream. What might their names suggest about their personalities?

**Hermia** is a derivation of Hermes, the Greek god of commerce—and a master thief. Hermes is renowned for his ability to sneak out of sticky situations before anyone can notice. Hermes is also the guardian of dreams.

**Helena** means light, and is related to the Greek word for the moon.

**Lysander** was the name of a famous Greek warrior. In Greek, “Lysander” means literally, “the man who escapes.”

**Demetrius** is a derivative of Demeter, the goddess of grain and agriculture.

**Titania** means “woman of the Titans.” The Titans were the oldest Greek gods, extremely powerful and fierce fighters.

**Oberon** derives from the old German words for “powerful elf.” In Edmund Spencer’s epic poem The Faerie Queene, Oberon is the father of the Fairy Queen herself, Queen Gloriana.

The Mechanicals are also aptly named. What might their names and the professions they represent suggest about their personalities?

**Nick Bottom** the weaver

**Francis Flute** the bellows-mender

**Snug** the joiner

**Tom Snout** the tinker

**Robin Starveling** the tailor
Act-by-Act Synopsis

**Act One**

While Duke Theseus and his recently conquered war bride-to-be Hippolyta anticipate their wedding, Egeus, an enraged nobleman, arrives at court with a problem. Egeus’s daughter, Hermia, refuses to wed Demetrius, her father’s choice, because she loves Lysander, Demetrius’s equal in both status and wealth. Despite Hermia’s protests, Theseus invokes Athenian law: Hermia must either agree to marry Demetrius, become a nun, or be put to death. To escape this harsh punishment, Hermia and Lysander plan to meet that night in the Athenian woods to run away and get married. They tell their secret plan to Hermia’s best friend Helena, who relates the plan to Demetrius in hope of winning his affections back. The lovers pursue each other into the forest. Meanwhile, a group of workmen, led by the boastful Nick Bottom, meet to hear the cast list for “Pyramus and Thisbe,” a play they hope to perform at the Duke’s wedding celebration. They too plan to meet that night in the forest for their first rehearsal.

**Act Two**

The forest, as it turns out, is as chaotic as Athens at the moment. Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of the fairies, are at war over a human child whom Titania has adopted, and the entire natural world is in disarray. Hoping to punish Titania for her stubbornness, Oberon sends his servant Puck in quest of a magic flower which, when squeezed into a sleeping victim’s eyes, will make her completely infatuated with the first thing she sees upon waking. While waiting for Puck to return, Oberon witnesses Demetrius’s rejection of a heartbroken Helena. Filled with pity for the girl, Oberon orders Puck to find the Athenian gentleman and enchant him too. But Puck mistakes Lysander for Demetrius, and when Helena stumbles upon the sleeping Lysander, it is he, and not Demetrius, who is suddenly smitten. Convinced that her best friend’s boyfriend is mocking her, Helena flees, pursued by Lysander. Hermia wakes and, finding Lysander gone, races off in search of him.

**Act Three**

Puck happens upon the amateur actors rehearsing “Pyramus and Thisbe” quite close to the place where Titania is sleeping. Inspired, Puck transforms the bombastic Bottom into an ass. The other actors, terrified by their friend’s transformation, flee the scene. Left alone, Bottom sings to bolster his spirits, and awakens Titania, who immediately falls in love with him. Puck brings the good news to Oberon, who praises his servant for his excellent work—until he sees Demetrius clearly under no magic spell, and still pursuing Hermia. To remedy the situation, Oberon applies the flower’s juice to the sleeping Demetrius’s eyes. Upon waking, Demetrius sees Helena, tailed by Lysander, and promptly falls in love with her, too! Hermia arrives on the scene and demands an explanation. Helena, still convinced that they are all playing a cruel joke on her, attacks Hermia for her part in the plot. Soon the two friends come to blows, and Lysander and Demetrius dash off to duel one another for Helena’s affections. Oberon warns Puck to keep the lovers apart until Oberon can repair the mistake. Puck uses his magic to trick Demetrius and Lysander into chasing after his voice until all four lovers collapse, exhausted. Puck reverses the charm on Lysander’s eyes, assuring the audience that all will soon be well.

**Act Four**

Oberon finds Titania sleeping happily with Bottom. He uses an herb to reverse the spell and Titania wakes, stunned to find herself beside an ass. Newly reconciled, the fairy king and queen recount the stories of their night just as day breaks. Theseus and his court come to the woods to hunt and find the four young lovers asleep together. Egeus demands that Demetrius and Hermia be married, but Demetrius explains that his love for Hermia has vanished, and now his heart belongs only to Helena. Theseus arranges for the lovers to share his wedding day, and all return to Athens. Meanwhile, Bottom wakes to find himself human again, convinced that the night was merely a dream.

**Act Five**

The marriage vows taken, and all stories told, Theseus and Hippolyta prepare for the evening’s entertainment. Theseus chooses “Pyramus and Thisbe,” which turns out to be a delightful disaster. After the three couples head off to bed, Puck tells us that if we haven’t enjoyed the play, we should simply think of it as a midsummer night’s dream.
Something Borrowed, Something New... Shakespeare's Sources for A Midsummer Night's Dream

He was more original than the originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life.
—WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR, 1846

...the most notable feature of the play is the dramatist's inventiveness, brilliantly fusing scattered elements from legend, folklore and earlier books and plays into a whole that remains as fresh and original now as when it was composed.
—R.A. FOAKES, 1984

It may surprise you to learn that not one of Shakespeare's plays is entirely original. In fact, Shakespeare borrowed all the time—from others' works, from myths and from English folklore. Sometimes he relied heavily on one or two sources. At other times, as when he wrote A Midsummer Night's Dream, he used bits and pieces from many sources, adapting and blending them to create a new masterpiece.

Two of the characters in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Theseus and Puck, were already well known to Shakespeare's audiences. Theseus is a character from Greek mythology, and stories of his conquests were very familiar. Shakespeare probably learned about Theseus from Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, in which Theseus is depicted as a fearsome warrior and a callous heartbreaker, a conqueror of cities and seducer of women across the world. In his play, however, Shakespeare focuses less on Theseus's past conquests; though Oberon does mention these affairs when taunting Titania, the Theseus we see is a more domesticated version of Plutarch's bloodthirsty conqueror.

Indeed, Shakespeare's Theseus looks more like the Theseus that appears in "The Knight's Tale," part of Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales (1387). In this story, Chaucer depicts Theseus as a wise and just ruler of Athens who has conquered the Amazons and married their queen, Hippolyta. Like Shakespeare, Chaucer focuses on the elaborate wedding preparations that surround Theseus's homecoming. Just like Shakespeare's, Chaucer's Theseus addresses a problem of unrequited love. In "The Knight's Tale," two of Theseus's prisoners fall in love with the same woman and escape into the nearby woods to duel for her love. Though this story may have inspired Shakespeare to create the characters of Lysander and Demetrius, it plays a more important role in Shakespeare's later collaboration with John Fletcher, called The Two Noble Kinsmen, which borrows extensively from the plot of "The Knight's Tale."

Though scholars do not attribute a single specific source to the story of the four lovers, theirs would not have been an unfamiliar one. The Pastoral, a popular genre in Shakespeare's day, was characterized by a desire to escape the confines of society in favor of a life surrounded by nature. In pastoral comedies, young couples could often be found fleeing into forests in search of a freer way of life. Shakespeare made frequent use of the pastoral genre in his later works, but the lovers in A Midsummer Night's Dream are the earliest examples of pastoral lovers in his plays.

Elizabethan playgoers would have recognized Puck as the legendary sprite Robin Goodfellow. Fairies, and Puck in particular, appear in many places in English folklore and were familiar figures associated with typical behaviors. The Elizabethans believed that fairies fell into two different categories: rural elves that inhabited mountains, forests and seas; and house sprites that helped with—or hindered—domestic duties. The malicious deeds that Puck is accused of perpetrating were well known to Elizabethan audiences, who would have also recognized his ability to shape-shift, and the broom he carries in Act 5, scene 1, used to sweep the doorsteps of maids whose milk he had stolen. But Shakespeare's Puck is less malicious than the demonic Robin Goodfellow of Elizabethan lore.

Fairy intervention in human affairs was a common notion to the Elizabethans. In Chaucer's "Merchant's Tale," the king and queen of fairies battle one another by meddling in the lives of a couple. Many scholars believe that this story inspired Titania and Oberon's battle. In the "Merchant's Tale," however, the fairies are careless with the mortals they influence, unlike Shakespeare's king and queen, who are often fiercely protective of the humans who stumble into their realm.

The name Oberon, which means "powerful elf," was probably taken from the magical fairy king who ruled an enchanted

The Pastoral, a popular genre in Shakespeare's day, was characterized by a desire to escape the confines of society in favor of a life surrounded by nature.
wood and protected the main character in the French romance *Huon of Bordeaux*, which was then translated into English by Lord Berners (ca. 1540). Oberon and his fairies controlled the weather, “all fantastie and enchauntments,” and the minds of mortals, whom they could trick into believing that they were in paradise. This Oberon is associated with the Far East and appears in one section on his way to “Inde,” which some critics believe to have inspired Shakespeare’s *Changeling Boy from India*. “Titania” is mentioned frequently in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where the poet uses the word to describe a descendent of the oldest Greek gods, including Diana, the goddess associated with the moon and the hunt.

Despite Shakespeare’s penchant for borrowing, scholars believe that Bottom and his crew are entirely original, inspired by the actors of the playwright’s own company, including the well-known clown, Will Kempe. The Mechanicals are certainly from Shakespeare’s England; their names are all puns on their professions: a “bottom” is the core on which a weaver winds yarn, a “quince” is a wedge a carpenter would have used for leveling a joint, and Starveling was probably named after the Elizabethan caricature of the rail-thin tailor. (For more on the meanings of characters’ names, see “Who’s Who: What’s in a Name?” on page 13.)

…a fairy king from French romance, a fairy queen from ancient Greek mythology, a sprite from English lore, and common players from the Elizabethan stage.

While the Mechanicals’ characters were original, their antics were probably not. In Anthony Murday’s play *John a Kent and John a Cumber* (ca. 1587-1590), terrible actors put on a play in front of bemused nobles. Murday’s play also contains a convoluted love plot and a trickster named Shrimp who bears a striking resemblance to Puck. Nor is the play of “Pyramus and Thisbe” unique to Shakespeare. It appears as a tragedy in *Metamorphoses*, and Shakespeare adapted it again in his own tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. Even Bottom’s transformation may have been borrowed. In Scot’s *Discoverie of Supposed Witchcraft*, a man finds an ass’s head placed on his shoulders by magic. In popular legend, as well as John Lyl’s play *Midas*, Midas’s head is turned into an ass’s head; the same magical occurrence happens in Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*, translated into English by William Adlington in 1566.

Foakes’s sentiments (quoted above) about Shakespeare’s diverse and masterful borrowing resonates especially when we consider the inhabitants of the woods in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. By the end of the play, the forest has contained a fairy king from French romance, a fairy queen from ancient Greek mythology, a sprite from English lore, and common players from the Elizabethan stage. As Foakes points out, what is most interesting about all of these sources is the way in which Shakespeare carefully selected them, twisting and changing existing stories to create a work of genius entirely his own. ✷
The Nature of Comedy

Shakespeare did not publish his plays, so we don’t know how he would have (or if he would have) classified them. But when his actor friends prepared his plays for publication seven years after Shakespeare’s death, they divided them into three categories in the First Folio: tragedies, histories, and comedies.

A comedy, of course, includes scenes—often many scenes—that make us laugh. But even Shakespeare’s darkest tragedies have scenes that welcome laughter—Othello, King Lear, Macbeth—all have clowns and fools providing levity and commentary. What, then, makes a comedy a comedy?

When scholars speak about the genre of Shakespearean comedy, they are referencing a particular dramatic structure. In a typical Shakespearean comedy, chaos, mistaken identities, disguises, confusion, even magical spells are followed by a return to order and a happy conclusion that wraps up all the loose ends. The play ends with hope for the future, usually in new families formed by the marriages of the central characters. Though the final outcome may seem unrealistic, we don’t complain because things end up the way we secretly hoped they would: Jack has his Jill, and all is well.

Comedy, like all drama, “holds a mirror up to nature,” and allows us to see ourselves from a distance, shining a spotlight on our human foibles. Comedy challenges our sense of self-importance and allows us to make light of our own, admittedly ridiculous, behaviors. In A Midsummer Night’s Dream, we see what happens when we are as bombastic and self-centered as Bottom, as blindly infatuated as Helena, and as fickle and forgetful as Demetrius. The lovers’ overblown poetry makes us laugh at all the grandiose things we’ve said at one point or another in our lives to express seemingly undying love.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream also portrays a darker side of life. At moments, the line between fun and fear, between comedy and tragedy, is thinly drawn. At a bit of a distance, we laugh at the chaos that envelops the lovers throughout their night in the fairy wood, even as we experience them becoming more frightened and angry. When Helena chases Demetrius, desperate and degraded, he seriously threatens to attack her.

The scene is written to be funny, though his threat of rape in a different situation would be horrifying. Indeed, many of the most comic moments in Dream are prompted by some disturbing circumstances. Oberon and Titania’s fighting takes on voyeuristic overtones as Oberon watches Titania and Bottom with sadistic glee. Theseus’s impending nuptials to Hippolyta become problematic if Hippolyta is considered a prisoner of war. And, as scholar Rene Girard puts it, the young lovers have a “tragic destiny from which they escape only by the sheer luck of being in a comedy.”

Scholar Charles Barber writes, “The finest comedy is not a diversion from serious themes but an alternative mode of developing them.” In his comedies, Shakespeare addresses darker topics through a lens that tells us we are allowed to laugh. Though they threaten one another fiercely, Demetrius and Lysander never actually do any real harm. After escaping into the forest, Hermia seems to forget the threat of death issued by her father. Theseus and Hippolyta’s marriage is blessed by the fairies, and Oberon and Titania are reconciled. With their conflicts far behind them in Athens, the characters exist entirely in the moment, and their antics are thereby made to appear all the more hilarious.

Shakespearean comedies point to the future, to the younger generation, and to new beginnings. Unlike many tragic heroes, comic characters are often young. The older generation plays an important part in setting the plot in motion, but they recede in prominence as the story progresses. It is as if they step aside and leave the stage to those whose adult lives still lie ahead. An older character may help bring the play to its conclusion or express approval by blessing the young characters as the play draws to a close, but it is the young men and women who hold the spotlight.

The label “comedy” directs our reactions. The woods are dark and deep, but the fact that we know we are watching a comedy calms any fears and allows us to laugh. After all, we tell ourselves, we can trust comedy not to let things get so out of control that they can’t be fixed, and Shakespeare, being the master playwright that he was, is perhaps the most trustworthy comedian of all. ✷
A History of Dreams

Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* blurs the line between reality and dreams. Characters, bound by the confines of society, struggle to escape their realities and stumble into a fantastic dreamscape, where anything can—and does—happen!

But where do dreams come from, and what did they mean to the citizens of Athens? To Shakespeare and his contemporaries? To audiences today? To uncover the answer, we must first travel back in time, to explore the ways that different civilizations thought about dreams and their meanings.

### Mesopotamians

The writers of the first dream interpretations in 3100 BCE, the Mesopotamians viewed dreams as prophesies that guided their everyday lives. A king’s dream, therefore, was much more important than a servant’s, because the king’s dream could lead to a change in law or policy that would affect the entire kingdom.

### Egyptians

The Egyptians believed that the gods spoke to mortals through dreams. Receiving and interpreting the gods’ messages was so important, in fact, that the Egyptians built special dream temples, where people could go to enhance their dreams. The Egyptians also used the help of professional dream interpreters to decode the gods’ wishes.

### Ancient Greeks

The Ancient Greeks believed that dreamers received messages from the gods, but not merely by listening. Ancient Greek gods physically entered a sleeper’s room through the keyhole, performing the kind of miracles that were impossible for mere mortals—like healing a wound or curing an ailment—before leaving the way they came. Greek gods could also punish sleepers who displeased them. Perhaps playing off this belief, Shakespeare both cursed and cured the Athenian dreamers in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, magically transforming them into monsters and washing their memories of inopportune infatuations.

### Ancient Chinese

Chinese dreamers believed that their souls left their bodies during sleep, transitioning to the land of the dead. There, dreamers could communicate with their ancestors, receiving inspiration and guidance before returning to their bodies at the end of the night.

### Ancient Hebrews

Claiming that “dreams which are not understood are like letters which are not opened,” the Ancient Hebrews believed that God sent messages to His people through their dreams. The Ancient Hebrews used the Talmud, a record of rabbinic law, ethics, philosophy, customs and history written between 200 and 500 AD, to help interpret their dreams.
Hindus

In the Upanishads, a set of philosophical texts that gave birth to Hinduism, dreams were interpreted in two different ways. The first stated that dreams were merely expressions of our innermost desires, projections of daytime longings into the sleeping mind. The second hypothesized that souls left their bodies during dreams. If the sleeper were to be awakened too suddenly, the soul might not be able to find its way back to the body, and the sleeper would die.

Romantics

English Romantic writer William Wordsworth articulated a theory on dreams that changed the study of dreams forever. Wordsworth believed that the sleeping mind had a set system of images, and that each image symbolized a specific emotion or desire. Using Wordsworth’s theories, dream interpretation was much easier for the average person to understand without the help of a professional dream interpreter. Wordsworth’s beliefs invited dreamers to base their readings on symbolic interpretation rather than any direct correlation between the dream world and the gods, a practice that is still widely used today.

Sigmund Freud

Perhaps the most famous dream interpreter, Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud sought to use dream analysis to uncover the hidden secrets of the human mind. Freud hypothesized that within every person, opposing forces were at war: manifest desires (or desires we know we have) and latent desires (or desires we conceal even from our conscious minds). According to Freud, the repression of these latent desires could cause mental illness, but the exploration of latent desires through dreams could lead to understanding and healing. In his 1899 book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud argued that “the most fantastic dream must have a meaning and can be used to unriddle the often incomprehensible maneuvers we call thinking.”

Elizabethans

Fueled by the scientific culture emerging during the English Renaissance, the Elizabethans began to look inward for the causation of dreams. Elizabethan doctors and playwrights alike pointed to chemicals in the body, called humors, to explain different dreams and personality traits. The stronger a particular humor was in a person, the clearer their dreams would be. For example, a sanguine person (someone characteristically jovial and passionate) would have dreams that reflected his particular humor. Shakespeare used his knowledge of the humors in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, when the most sanguine character, Bottom the Weaver, “dreams” of a happy, lusty encounter with the queen of the fairies.

Victorians

Fascinated by the supernatural, the Victorians were less interested in dreams than in visions. Victorians convened for gatherings called séances, where they would enter a trance-like state similar to sleep in an attempt to commune with the dead. During these séances, objects flew seemingly unaided around the room, unexplained noises were heard, and the dead delivered messages to loved ones still living. However, these messages could only be received with the help of an interpreter, or medium, and well-respected mediums quickly became celebrities in Victorian society.
Spirits of Another Sort

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If we shadows have offended
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumb'red here,
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream.

(V.1.422-27)

Puck's closing address to the audience is characteristic of the tone of A Midsummer Night's Dream; it seems to trivialize what it obliquely praises. All the key words of dream are here, as they have been from the play's title and opening lines: "shadows," "slumb'red," "visions," and "dream" itself. Puck is making an important analogy between the play and the dream state—an analogy we have encountered before in Shakespeare, but which is here for the first time carefully explored. For A Midsummer Night's Dream is a play consciously concerned with dreaming; it reverses the categories of reality and illusion, sleeping and waking, art and nature, to touch upon the central theme of the dream which is truer than reality.

Puck offers the traditional apologia at the play's end; if the audience is dissatisfied, it may choose to regard the play as only a "dream" or trifle and not a real experience at all. The players, as Theseus has already suggested, are only "shadows" (V.1.212); the play, in short, is potentially reducible to a "weak and idle theme" of no significance. Yet everything which has gone before points in precisely the opposite direction: sleep in A Midsummer Night's Dream is the gateway, not to folly, but to revelation and reordering; the "visions" gained are, as Bottom says, "most rare" (V.1.208), and the "shadows" substantial. Puck's purposeful ambiguity dwells yet again on a lesson learned by character after character within the play: that reason is impoverished without imagination, and that we must accept the dimension of dream in our lives. Without this acknowledgment, there can be no real self-knowledge.

The fundamental reversal or inversion of conventional categories which is a structuring principle of this play is familiar to us in part from the framing device of The Taming of the Shrew. The Athenian lovers flee to the wood and fall asleep, entering as they do so the charmed circle of dream. When Puck comes upon them and anoints their eyes, the world of the supernatural at once takes over the stage, controlling their lives in a way they cannot guess at, but must accept, "apprehending" "more than cool reason ever comprehends." In the great dream of the forest experience and the smaller dreams within it, we might say paradoxically that their eyes are opened; this is the fundamental significance of the key word "vision," which appears several times in the play, offsetting the deliberately disparaging use of "dream" to mean something insignificant, momentary.

By contrast, "vision," as it is introduced into the play, is a code word for the dream understood, the dream correctly valued. Often the user does not know that he knows; this is another of the play's thematic patterns, supporting the elevation of the irrational above the merely rational. As a device it is related to a character type always present in Shakespeare, but more highly refined in the later plays, that of the wise fool. Thus Bottom, awakening, is immediately and intuitively impressed with the significance of his "dream," which we of course recognize as not a dream at all, but rather a literal reality within the play.

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was.

(V.1.205-07)

It is [the] transposition of transformation which is the special prerogative of the dream state and the center of interest of the whole of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Dream is truer than reality because it has this transforming power; it is part of the fertile, unbounded world of the imagination.

...a lesson learned by character after character within the play: that reason is impoverished without imagination, and that we must accept the dimension of dream in our lives.

At the last, as Puck alone remains upon the stage, the "shadows" of A Midsummer Night's Dream have become inexhaustibly evocative, "no more yielding but a dream," in a dramatic world where dreams are a reliable source of vision and heightened insight, consistently truer than the reality they seek to interpret and transform. ✷

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### 1600s & 1700s

I sent for some dinner…and then to the King’s Theatre, where we saw Midsummer Night’s Dream, which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life.

**SAMUEL PEPSY 1662**

But certainly the greatness of this Author’s Genius does no where so much appear, as where he gives his Imagination an entire Loose, and raises his Fancy to a flight above Mankind and the limits of the visible World…It is the same Magick that raises the Fairies in Midsummer Night’s Dream, the Witches in Macbeth, and the Ghost in Hamlet, with Thoughts and Language so proper to the Parts they sustain, and so peculiar to the Talent of this Writer.

**NICHOLAS ROWE 1709**

I am very sensible that he do’s, in this Play, depart too much from that likeness to Truth which ought to be observ’d in these sort of writings; yet he do’s it so very finely, that one is easily drawn in to have more Faith for his sake, that Reason does well allow of.

**NICHOLAS ROWE 1709**

There is a kind of Writing, wherein the Poet quite loses sight of Nature, and entertains his Reader’s Imagination with the Characters and Actions of such Persons as have many of them no Existence, but what he bestows on them. Such are Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits…There is a very odd turn of Thought required for this sort of Writing…Among the English, Shakespeare has incomparably excelled all others.

**JOSEPH ADDISON 1712**

The imagination of the waking consciousness is a civilized republic, kept in order by the voice of the magistrate; the imagination of the dreaming consciousness is the same republic, delivered up to anarchy.

**DIDEROT ca. 1772**

The piece has great poetical and dramatic merit, considered in general; but a puerile plot, an odd mixture of incidents, and a forced connection of various styles throw a kind of shade over that blaze of merit many passages would otherwise have possessed.

**FRANCIS GENTLEMAN 1774**

### 1800s

The different parts of the plot: the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, Oberon and Titania’s quarrel, the flight of the two pairs of lovers, and the theatrical maneuvers of the mechanicals, are so lightly and happily interwoven that they seem necessary to each other for the formation of the whole.

**AUGUST WILHELM SCHLEGEL 1808**

Spirits and fairies cannot be represented, they cannot even be painted—they can only be believed.

**CHARLES LAMB 1811**

The Midsummer Night’s Dream, when acted, is converted from a delightful fiction into a dull pantomime. All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation…Poetry and the stage do not agree well together…Thus Bottom’s head in the play is a fantastic illusion, produced by magic spells: on the stage it is an ass’s head, and nothing more; certainly a strange costume for a gentleman to appear in. Fancy cannot be embodied any more than a simile can be painted; and it is as idle to attempt it as to personate Wall or Moonshine. Fairies are not incredible, but fairies six feet high are so.

**WILLIAM HAZLITT 1817**

In the Midsummer Night’s Dream, all Eden is unlocked before us, and the whole treasury of natural and supernatural beauty poured out profusely, to the delight of all our faculties.

**FRANCIS JEFFREY 1817**

In the Midsummer Night’s Dream, again, we have the old traditional fairy, a lovely mode of preternatural life, remodeled by Shakespeare’s eternal talisman. . . The dialogue between Oberon and Titania is, of itself, and taken separately from its connection, one of the most delightful poetic scenes that literature affords.

**THOMAS DE QUINCEY 1838**

Throughout there is such a wanton play of fancy and frolic. Such chameleon–like succession of tricks and complicated cross-purpose that at first sight we are disposed to deny that it can possess any rational meaning.

**HERMANN ULRICI 1839**

Bottom the Weaver is the representative of the whole human race…the same personification of that self-love which the simple cannot conceal and the wise can with difficulty repress.

**CHARLES KNIGHT 1849**

The Midsummer Night’s Dream is too exquisite a composition to be dulled by the infliction of philosophical analysis.

**J. O. HALLIWELL-PHILLIPPS 1879**
WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

1900s

A Midsummer Night’s Dream is a psychological study, not of a solitary man, but of a spirit that unites mankind…The whole question which is balanced, and balanced nobly and fairly, in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, is whether the life of waking, or the life of the vision, is the real life.

G. K. CHESTERTON 1904

Productions arose which explored the fairy world as the repository of whatever is repressed in a society, sexuality, violence, racism, imperialism, homosexuality. The fairies, heretofore ethereal, airy beings, were transformed into erotic spirits whose playful antics could occasionally turn dangerous.

MARGARET LUCY 1906

What else was Shakespeare’s chief delight in this play but the word-music to be spoken by Oberon, Titania, and Puck?…So recklessly happy in writing such verse does Shakespeare grow that even the quarrel of the four lovers is stayed by a charming speech of Helena’s 37 lines long. For Shakespeare has sacrificed every other more purely dramatic advantage to this one. He allows himself no absorbing complexity of plot, no development of character.

HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER 1914

The quintessence of all these comedies (as we may say of Hamlet in respect of the great tragedies) is the Midsummer Night’s Dream… The little drama seems born of a smile, so delicate, refined and ethereal it is.

BENEDETT O. CROCE 1920

In A Midsummer Night’s Dream, all the best of Shakespeare’s earlier poetry is woven into so comprehensive and exquisite a design that it is hard not to feel that this play alone is worth all the other romances.

G. WILSON KNIGHT 1932

Look how impoverished the poet’s imagination really is. Shakespeare, in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, has a woman fall in love with a donkey. The audience wonders at that.

SIGMUND FREUD c. 1938

A dream is the theater in which the dreamer is himself, the scene, the player, the prompter, the producer, the author, the public, and the critic.

C.G. JUNG 1948

Young love, as Shakespeare presents it, is passionate, intense, permeated with lyrical wonder and indefinite magic, but it is transient, irrational, full of frenzy and fantasy.

E.C. PETTET 1949

A Midsummer Night’s Dream as a whole is prophetic, in one respect at least, as is no other of the earlier plays, of the course the poet’s genius was to take. There are few more fruitful ways of regarding his works than to think of them as an account of the warfare between Imagination and Chaos—or, if you will, between Imagination and the World—the story of the multifarious attempts of the divine faculty in man to ignore, to escape, to outwit, to surmount, to combat, to subdue, to forgive, to convert, to redeem, to transmute into its own substance, as the case may be, the powers of disorder that possess the world.

HAROLD C. GODDARD 1951

A gap divides the human participants’ view from ours. This gap is unique in Shakespeare’s comedies in that it remains open even at the end of the play. We alone know that an immortal spirit has manipulated human events, and solved a mortal problem.

BERTRAND EVANS 1960

A Midsummer Night’s Dream is best seen, in fact, as…a suite of dances—gay, sober, stately, absurd…The dance is a dance of emotions, but…Shakespeare limits our response by showing us the lovers as the mere puppets of the fairies.

G. K. HUNTER 1962

The life in the lovers’ part is not to be caught in the individual speeches, but by regarding the whole movement of the farce, which swings and spins each of them through a common pattern, an evolution that seems to have an impersonal power of its own.

C.L. BARBER 1963

Love’s choices remain inexplicable, and the eventual pairings are determined only by the constancy of Helena and Hermia in their initial choices.

R.W. DENT 1964

It is [Puck] who…pulls all the characters on strings. He liberates instincts and puts the mechanism of this world in motion. He puts it in motion and mocks it at the same time.

JAN KOTT 1964

[Puck] can be the merry sprite or Oberon’s instrument of torture who delights in other’s pain and says, “What fools these mortals be!” in joyous superiority and contempt, playful but evil, the Vice of the morality plays, the archetypal spy and gnomish spirit of the devil, as Jan Kott would have him.

ALLAN LEWIS 1965

Who are we to say with assurance what madness is when a sudden change in reality can make it sanity?

DAVID P. YOUNG 1966

A Midsummer Night’s Dream is itself a panorama of smaller scenes and characters, a great landscape with cities, woods, fields, mountains, valleys, river, ocean, and a host of figures representative of society and the supernatural…[T]he panoramas contribute significantly to the play’s atmosphere of magic, spaciousness and limitless possibility, all attributes of the power of imagination which it both derives from and celebrates.

DAVID P. YOUNG 1966
Anyone expecting the kind of “true-to-life” subtlety of personality with which Shakespeare endows characters in the other comedies will be disappointed at the thinness of detail in the “personalities” of Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius… After reading or watching A Midsummer Night’s Dream we have the greatest difficulty remembering for long even important details about the characters… Their names seem little more than labels, as interchangeable as their alliances in the wood.

**STEPHEN FENDER 1968**

Does not the play, then, suggest that love is as much a dream as are the midsummer night’s happenings? And cannot this dream, comic though it may be in the play, very easily be rocked into nightmare?

**MICHAEL TAYLOR 1969**

This is a mysterious play, and there is nothing in it by accident, nothing by chance. Other playwrights’ meanings can be fully fathomed. But here the material is as if beyond Shakespeare altogether.

**PETER BROOK 1970**

Why should there be a set? In a dream, places displace each other, contrary to all logic.

**PETER BROOK 1970**

We can at best give our rather arch approval to the elegance of the play’s verse, the symmetrical disposition of its worlds, and the graceful unfolding of its movements while at the same time, in the flintier portions of our soul, endorsing Theseus’s “I never may believe / These antique fables nor their fairy toys” (5.1.2-3).

**JAMES CALDERWOOD 1971**

Shakespeare’s basic comic strategy in the play: He suggests that the two sides of man’s mind (conscious/civilized and unconscious/archaic) simply have nothing to do with one another and he underscores this suggestion by making them have nothing to do with one another in actuality,

**M.D. FABER 1972**

A Midsummer Night’s Dream is the happiest of Shakespeare’s plays, and very possibly the happiest work of literature ever conceived…A Midsummer Night’s Dream moves in dreamlike sequences as if on the brink of an eternal bliss.

**THOMAS MCFARLAND 1972**

"Pyramus and Thisby," while comic in performance, is unreliedly tragic in conception. In it we see the spectacle of the father who harshly opposes the marriage of his daughter, just as was the case with Egeus and Hermia. But here the result is not reconciliation, but tragic death for the lovers. Similarly the menacing forest of the playlet, which contains the fatal lion, stands as a tragic alternative to the amiable world of the Athenian wood…In the cathartic world of art the outcome is death, not marriage. The play-within-a-play thus absorbs and disarms the tragic alternative, the events which did not happen. Art becomes a way of containing and triumphing over unbearable reality.

**MARGORIE GARBER 1974**

There are two watchers—Puck, with his delight in chaos, and Oberon, who wishes to bring chaos to an end. We share in both these attitudes.

**ALEXANDER LEGGATT 1974**

The first couple’s happiness appears threatened from the outside, but the second couple, even from the start, insist on being unhappy by themselves, always falling in love with the wrong person. We soon realize that Shakespeare is more interested in this systematically self-defeating type of passion than in the initial theme of “true love,” something unconquerable by definition and always in need of villainous enemies if it is to provide any semblance of dramatic plot.

**RENÉ GIRARD 1979**

Separating the lovers but also providing a medium of communication, binding them in a union of partition, this wall stands both as a comic, literal-minded device and as a literalization of one of the play’s key figures. The wall acts as a visual metaphor [for all human relationships]. These reflections should lead us to wonder about what we are laughing at when we find the mechanicals ridiculous… What, after all, is more ridiculous: to personate the wall that stands between us all, thereby insisting that we see it, or to act as if the wall is not there?

**DAVID MARSHALL 1982**

Some critics have felt the play affirms the importance of the world of dreams or fantasy, and shows that reason impoverishes the imagination; others have recognized the extent to which it also exposes the absurdities of the imagination and gives approval to the voice of reason. It seems to me that A Midsummer Night’s Dream achieves a splendid balance between the two; if the imagination makes possible visions and experiences otherwise inaccessible, and liberates natural energies from the restraints of reason, those visions and experiences are only given form and meaning through the reason.

**R.A. FOAKES 1984**

Our world of daily tragedies is more faithfully mirrored in the godless world of Pyramus and Thisbe than in the fairy world of the Athenian woods.

**VIRGIL HUTTON 1985**

Bottom wakes up along with the lovers and makes one of the most extraordinary speeches in Shakespeare… He will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of his dream, and “It shall be called Bottom’s Dream, because it hath no bottom.” Like most of what Bottom says, this is absurd; like many absurdities in Shakespeare, it makes a lot of sense. Bottom does not know that he is anticipating by three centuries a remark of Freud: “every dream has a point at which it is unfathomable; a link, as it were, with the unknown.”…He will never see his Titania again, nor even remember that she had once loved him…But he has been closer to the center of this wonderful and mysterious play than any other of its characters, and it no longer matters that Puck thinks him a fool or that Titania loathes his asinine face.

**NORTHROP FRYE 1986**

www.chicagoshakes.com
If the comedy of A Midsummer Night’s Dream depended on the transformation of personality by magical enchantment, Shakespeare, not Quince, would be the mechanical playwright. The chief source of delight is the refusal of those who are enchanted to change their customary way of behaving or even admit that they are enchanted despite the curious lengthening of Bottom’s ears and the instantaneous reversals of Demetrius and Lysander’s passions. Although their circumstances radically change, they remain stubbornly the same, their feet firmly planted on the floor even when the floor becomes the ceiling.

ROBERT ORNSTEIN 1986

Faires make excellent mediators. They mediate between matter and spirit, in that whilst they are insubstantial shape changers, they are mortal, give birth, and eventually fade away. They mediate between habitat and wilderness, structure and communitas. They reside either in the wilderness or parts of habitat that have fallen back into the wilderness such as paths, deserted churches, etc.

However, they possess a structured society of their own, often inverted to the normal—nocturnal and matriarchal—and maintain an interest in human affairs. They mediate between the polities of good and evil, encapsulated in the tradition that they are fallen angels, too bad for heaven, too good for hell. They mediate between the human and the divine, as both elevated ancestors (the ghosts of the prehistoric dead) and fallen gods.

PETER ROGERSON 1986

This play represents neither the views on sex and marriage, nor the news on fancy held by Shakespeare and his contemporaries; instead it presents the significance of love as a way of knowing higher truth.

JANE K. BROWN 1987

[The play] demonstrates the universal power of love, which can overcome the queen of fairies as readily as the lowliest of men. It also suggests the irrational nature of love and its affinity to enchantment, witchcraft, and even madness. Love is seen as an affliction taken in through the frail sense, particularly the eyes. When it strikes, the victim cannot choose but to embrace the object of his infatuation.

DAVID BEVINGTON 1988

At the beginning of the play Hermia and Lysander are types of young lovers right out of Greek and Roman literature, who plot to trick a stern father by escaping to a dowager aunt who will solve their problems for them. Helena, Echo-like, would be anyone, anything rather than be herself. And Demetrius, still a Narcissus, has been so frightened by the mystery of what he feels for Helena that he willingly accedes to Egeus’s plan to arrange a marriage for him. All four, in self-confusion, follow the way of adolescence: flight. Keep moving before your self catches up with you.

ROBERT KIMBROUGH 1990

Shakespeare uses desire here as an instrument to differentiate between the genders: inside men, desire tends to eradicate the personality of its object; inside women, it does not.

MARK TAYLOR 1991

Puck is...so clearly a figure projected from the folk imagination, a way of giving a quasi-human identity and thus providing a reason for a series of random domestic mishaps, the unseen or disguised power that we still sometimes feel to be behind a daily world experienced as perverse, or for unexplained reasons resistant to or thwarting of our purposes.

RONALD R. MACDONALD 1992

It’s a play about four young people who get lost in a frightening place, a forest, at night. And in that forest their true selves emerge. They go through a metamorphosis and for that to happen, they have to go through pain and torment in order to discover who they are. They discover who they are in terms of sex and in terms of their relationships with each other. Young people today go through the same kind of trauma in their imagination and sexual awareness.

KENNETH MCLEISH 1992

A Midsummer Night’s Dream is endlessly fascinated by the possibilities of transformation and translation within its action and by its metamorphoses of its materials.

PETER HOLLAND 1994

Shakespeare’s warning to the audience is unmistakable: prudent readers...will resist the pressure to interpret the vision.

ANNABEL PATTERSON 1998

If there were ever a play written about young people, immersed in the painful process of growing up, it’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

JOE DOWLING 1999
The lovers are apathetic about nothing. In our culture apathy is rewarded: to be cool is to not care. [The lovers] care about everything. I hope to show that love is something to be passionate about.

**GARY GRIFFIN 2001**

At the end of courtship’s arduous journey, the chaos finally settles. Couples submit to the laws of their society and take up their rightful positions as mature householders and sexually responsible adults—as parents, that is. As far as romantic comedy is concerned, this is a closed subject, as accepted and unarguable as the long-established relationships of the parents and guardians from which the younger generation both distance themselves and take their cue.

**CATHERINE BATES 2002**

Shakespeare’s fairies laugh at mortal folly but they hardly moralize it. Given the on-going quarrel between Oberon and Titania, the play’s ironies derive from parallelism between the two sets of characters rather than the knowing superiority of one set over the other, and hence surround the fairies as well as the mortals.

**JANETT E. DILLON 2002**

The implication is that the play is not a comic dream so much as a nightmare; the forest scenes have more than a touch of creepy reality.

**BRUCE WEBER 2002**

Helena is accurate in perceiving that the terms of what she and Hermia once enjoyed have changed; that the asexuality, or sexual latency, of childhood has yielded to the sexual identity of young womanhood, and that men, once of so little importance that they could be excluded from the company of females, now possess the power to drive women apart, even with no effort on their part.

**MARY TAYLOR 2002**

Everyone in the play, everyone, that is, aside from the mechanicals, is either married or to be married. And all seem singularly unsuited to long-term success within the institution proper. Titania and Oberon are miserable; Hippolyta is a recalcitrant war bride; and the lovers fail to offer even one good reason why they should be together.

**MEGAN M. MATCHINSKE 2003**

The plot into which Puck and Oberon intervene has already been planned out and set in motion by Hermia and Helena. Hermia deceives her father to secure Lysander as her spouse, and Helena deceives both her friends (Hermia and Lysander) and the object of her affections (Demetrius) in the hope of winning what seems a lost love cause. Both women play the match-maker for themselves. Their boldness in this regard is seconded—significantly, not initiated—by Oberon.

**REGINA BUCCOLA 2006**

The experiences of the bewitched characters are explained as occurring on the borders of consciousness… Like the lovers in the play, if the audience are perturbed by the fantastic display they have witnessed, then they can explain it away as a dream.

**SARAH CARTER 2006**

Dreams are always a kind of caricature, over-simplifying motives in one way or another. And the machinery of this Dream is designed to provide a masque-like entertainment by the use of such conventions, and the establishing of such expectations, as readily allow for sudden reversals whereby, for instance, a character can at one moment be vowing eternal loyalty to another; and at the next moment is headed in a quite different direction, paying equally zestful court to someone else.

**SCOTT L. NEWSTOK 2006**

The Dream is all about translation, in the old sense of metamorphosis. Helena is prepared to give the world to be ‘translated’ into Hermia; Puck declares that he has ‘translated’ Pyramus; and in the most familiar line in this vein, Bottom’s colleagues tell him, aghast, ‘thou art translated.’

**ANANDA LAL 2008**

There are different levels of resonance in Dream for us today. On an immediate, social level, there is the patriarchy and authoritarianism with which Egeus attempts to impose his will on his daughter and there is the friction, playfulness and truth with which Shakespeare portrays the distance between the aristocracy and the workmen. On a visceral and emotional level, the Dream is a great drama of human emotions and relationships—the agonies and flippancy of love; the shifting ground between master and servant, friend and rival, husband and wife; the extraordinary detail etched within Quince, Bottom, and their fellow actors. Here, certainly, Shakespeare achieves a truth that defies time and place.

**TIM SUPPLE 2006**

The woods of A Midsummer Night’s Dream are a fantastical notion…If you really could live within your dreams you wouldn’t want to. They’re actually too vibrant, too potent, too extreme. There’s something right and normal about waking life. Dreams are good to have, but we shouldn’t exist in them perpetually.

**AMANDA DEHNERT 2009**

…I want [the audience] to feel that it’s okay…to think of the play in a more subconscious way. It’s not performed at you. It’s performed from within you.

**GARY GRIFFIN 2011**
A Midsummer Night’s Dream in Performance

What one age considers right, is right for that age at a particular moment of history, but the society upon which the impact is made, the audience of the moment, is endlessly changing, and therefore so do performances and interpretations.

—ALLAN LEWIS, 1965

Though scholars debate the exact date of the play’s premiere, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was likely first performed in 1595 or 1596 at a wedding among the aristocracy. With its interweaving plots and central theme of love, the *Dream* was perfect for a nuptial ceremony, and was frequently adapted to fit other occasions. Much more radical changes to the play occurred during the English Civil War, which began in 1642, when audience members, surrounded by a society in upheaval, were no longer entertained by the chaotic quarrels of Oberon and Titania. Thus, the fairies and lovers were cut from the plot, and *The Merry Conceited Humors of Bottom the Weaver* was performed in smaller venues with varied success.

When the monarchy was restored to the throne in 1660, life began to return to normal for the English people. Under the patronage of the new king, Charles II, who had been inspired by the thriving theatrical scene on the continent where he had lived in exile during the civil war, theater in England flourished, and the *Dream* grew from a rustic comedy to a full opera, which composer Henry Purcell called *The Fairy Queen*, in 1692. Purcell and librettist Thomas Betterton cut Athens from the play entirely, and “modernized” much of Shakespeare’s speech. The addition of music helped audiences better envision the world of the fairies, and productions soon began to focus more on Oberon and Titania than Theseus and Hippolyta. This fascination with the fairies was made explicit in 1755, when the famous London actor and director David Garrick re-envisioned the play with lots of music—and without the mechanicals!

The *Dream’s* “fairy mania” continued into the nineteenth century, when composer Felix Mendelssohn’s score for an 1843 production in Potsdam enchanted audiences across Europe. Through his music, Mendelssohn sought to depict each of the characters with a unique musical theme; the violins play the fairies running through the forest, and blaring brays from the brass section sound just like Bottom’s transformation into a donkey.

Mendelssohn’s lighthearted music inspired increasingly lavish stagings during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These productions were characterized by fluffy, pure, perfect dreams in idyllic woodland settings. In 1900, one stage was carpeted in thyme and wildflowers. In 1911, Herbert Beerbohm Tree’s production featured live rabbits hopping around the actors’ feet. To populate these magical sets, directors called for armies of fairies dressed in light-as-air costumes and bedecked with wings. In his notes, Tree listed the need for “special flying fairies, 4 fireflies, 9 imps, 4 sea urchins, 8 wood elves, and 2 wood fairies,” in addition to Oberon and Titania’s attendants. It seemed that Elizabethan superstitions had been abandoned forever.

Once again, however, the advent of war marked an abrupt change for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In 1914, at the outset of World War I, the Savoy Theatre in London staged an exotic and threatening production of the *Dream*. In it, the actors moved away from “gauzy, nostalgic romanticism” toward Eastern-inspired, gold-painted fairies with bright costumes and elaborate headdresses. The director, Harley Granville-Barker, believed that older productions used gauze and glamour to disguise the emotional truths that reside in Shakespeare’s text. He sought to make audiences take a closer look at the mischief, the power struggles, and the violence in the play, saying in a 1912 letter to the *Daily Mail*, “I abide by the text and the demands of the text, and beyond that I claim freedom.” Throughout the twentieth century, productions of the *Dream* followed Granville-Barker’s example. Harcourt Williams’s 1930
production at the Old Vic featured elemental, seaweed-clad fairies, and a 1954 Old Vic production marked the end of Victorian stagings of the play. Bertolt Brecht, a German director, infused his *Dream* with stark sets and obvious illusions, constantly reminding audiences that the magic of the fairies was, in fact, the magic of the theater.

In 1970, English Peter Brook directed a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that had a magic all its own, and still today serves as a cornerstone inspiring productions more than forty years later. Completely turning his back on late-Romantic idealism, Brook staged his *Dream* inside a “white box,” leaving the floor and walls of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Stratford stage completely pristine. Actors tumbled offstage, flew in on trapezes, and fell asleep in hammocks suspended above the stage, yet, as in Shakespeare’s time, there was no furniture, nothing to sit on or hide behind. The starkness of Brook’s set placed the responsibility for setting the scene entirely on the actors’ shoulders, and the result was a breathtaking performance infused with both emotion and levity. Sexually charged and honest, Brook’s production was acclaimed by critics and audiences alike, and, for the next four decades, productions of the Dream have been influenced in one way or another by Brook’s profound vision.

Directors eager to embrace the technical challenges of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* found a solution to their problems in film. While early twentieth-century stage directors were turning away from the lushness and supernatural aspects of the forest, film directors capitalized on these images, creating versions of the Dream seemingly more at home in the Victorian era than the modern one. An idyllic portrayal of the fairy world, so unpopular in contemporary theater, was made possible by the technology available to film producers, and the industry capitalized on these opportunities. In 1935, Max Reinhardt’s film adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* featured Mickey Rooney as Puck, and included a “cast of 1,000,” comprised mostly of fairies flying around the set with glittering lanterns clutched in their hands. Michael Hoffman’s 1999 film adaptation, starring Kevin Kline as Bottom and Stanley Tucci as Puck, was similarly crowded with extras, though not quite as glibber as in Reinhardt’s film. In Hoffman’s version, Nick Bottom is an imaginative dreamer trapped in a world of Tuscan commerce. The forest represents an escape from society, and the characters stumble through it looking beautifully disheveled until dawn breaks to the tune of Mendelssohn’s music.

Most recently, productions of the *Dream* have struck a balance between Victorian idealism and contemporary gravity. In 2000, Joe Dowling directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, creating a production that combined the fantasy of the forest with the austerity of the court. Dressed in power suits and stifled by protocol, Theseus and Hippolyta stood in stark contrast to the brightly clad fairies, whose music-making caused many audience members to liken the production to a rock concert.

English director Tim Supple also sought to present the play in a visually and aurally exciting way. In 2004, Supple was commissioned by the British council to create a touring production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for India. Inspired by the performers themselves, Supple’s *Dream* drew on the skills of twenty-three artists from across India and Sri Lanka, including dancers, actors, martial arts experts, musicians and street acrobats. This exciting production completed its North American tour at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater in 2008. With a production that was performed in eight different languages—half in English, half in the South Asian languages native to the performers—Supple sought to present a *Dream* that challenged the audience’s expectations about how Shakespeare should be heard and seen. Rather than in the lush vegetation of the forest, Supple’s *Dream* took place in a barren desert, the stage covered with red dirt out of which grew an immense bamboo scaffolding that the actors climbed and swung from. Puck ensnared the lovers in a literal web made of elastic bands, laughing as they became hopelessly entangled. Supple saw in *A Midsummer
A Midsummer Night’s Dream a play whose structure, story, and characters naturally embrace the wide variety of performance traditions and cultures that exist in our contemporary world.

In 2009, Amanda Dehnert brought her own interpretation of the fairies to Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s stage in an abridged production for CST’s education program. Inspired by the shifting nature of the immortals, Dehnert chose puppeteers and their whimsical puppets as her fairies, populating her forest with a menagerie of strange creatures and transforming CST’s Courtyard Theater into a world of shifting seasons. In Dehnert’s seventy-five minute production, the fairies had been lost in the forest since ancient times and reclaimed by nature; Titania’s dress was a web of dry leaves and flowers, and Oberon’s magic flower grew out of his shoe. Dehnert’s nature-inspired fairies recalled the sprites of Mendelssohn’s ballet, while the use of puppets added a new dimension to the otherworldliness of the play.

The last time that the play was staged on CST’s stage, Associate Artistic Director Gary Griffin staged a full-length production in 2012. Inspired by the theme of dreams and wish-fulfillment, Griffin set his production in early nineteenth-century Europe at the time of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis and modern dream theory. The play began in Dr. Freud’s parlor, with the doctor played by a cigar-smoking Elizabeth Ledo, who soon disrobed from her tweed suit to reveal her doubled character as Puck. Freud reappeared at the play’s conclusion to speak Puck’s closing monologue, “If we shadows have offended…” The Fairies and Mechanicals were also double-cast, costumed in striped pajamas, further explicating the convergence of dream and the fairy world.

While beliefs about the supernatural have changed significantly since Shakespeare’s day, the characters in A Midsummer Night’s Dream continue to fascinate directors, actors and audience members. Each time a director approaches a play, he or she strives to bring something new to light. Even now, over 400 years after it was written, artists are uncovering new attitudes about the Dream, using it to illuminate the world in which we live today, as well as to learn about Shakespeare’s world of the past.
A Conversation with the Director

Director David H. Bell met with Director of Education Marilyn Halperin to discuss his ideas for his upcoming production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Q. Have you directed Dream before?
A. This is my fourth! My first was my graduation from college thesis project. It is a show I dearly love.

Q. Now all these years later as a “veteran director” do you see the play differently?
A. What is wonderful about revisiting Shakespeare is what you learn about yourself. Now that I am sixty-four, the play is uniquely and profoundly different. Its comic content reminds me a lot more now of Comedy of Errors, in that the stakes in both are very high and they have to be motivated and propelled by a great sense of urgency and truth. But once they start playing out, you lose that dark overlay of motivation that makes us compelled to begin the story. I think you have to believe, totally, that Hermia is on the brink of choosing death over marrying Demetrius, this person that she doesn’t love.

Instead, she and Lysander escape to the Woods of Athens. All of a sudden, the social constructs start to fall away. The laws that society imposes are replaced by laws that nature imposes. What are the laws of man? What are the laws of love? And, as in so many of the later plays, like The Tempest, Cymbeline, Winter’s Tale, what is reality versus a dream, versus fantasy? I always find the lines between comedy and tragedy slightly blurred, but this is the first time I really have a strong feeling that the line between fantasy and reality is equally blurred. So I find these things compelling about the play. It also embraces the fairy world in a way that, other than The Fairy Queen, doesn’t exist anywhere else in the canon to this degree.

The Golden Bough is one of the great theological books. It’s about mythology as much as anything else, and was for years the source of all analysis of folklore, how cultures construct this folkloric past, how they respond to it. The “midsummer night’s dream” is in reference to midsummer’s eve, the night when anything can happen. And, indeed, there is a dialogue that Shakespeare’s having here between the rules of man as opposed to the rules of nature. All of a sudden, I see Shakespeare, the rebel—someone who bristles with the rules of man, which people make and are arbitrary. What happens in the woods? What happens in the forest? In Shakespeare, often the flight to the forest is in response to the social injustices that men place on other people. All of that thrills me. Midsummer Night’s Dream taps into a root of spirituality, a comment on the laws of men versus the law of nature.

Q. How do you think this story will connect emotionally with our student audiences?
A. When I was in high school, certainly, there were always some rules that seemed arbitrary: girls had to wear skirts of a certain length, guys couldn’t wear jeans, you know? There were rules and many of them made sense, was great. Many of them just seemed like nonsense and the exertion for rules for the sake of rules. And I do think that A Midsummer Night’s Dream is addressing some of those…that you don’t love necessarily who your father tells you to love. You love who you love, and the fact that there is a societal proscription doesn’t mean that’s where your heart goes.

And then there’s the mix-up of identities in the forest… So that even Hermia’s choice, on some level, can be arbitrary; that given the right magic, at the right moment, on the right midsummer’s eve, Lysander could be as attracted to Helena as he is to Hermia. That as human beings we are capable of loving differently from what our mind thinks. We are wired in so many ways to think we know what we like. I think of a child who won’t eat Brussels sprouts and then, at some point goes, Wow, Brussels sprouts are the best food ever. And he never liked Brussels sprouts…

There are a million things that we fairly arbitrarily set our mind toward or against, and we state clearly what our preferences are before we know them. They are whims or thoughts of the moment. I think Shakespeare’s getting to the fact that sometimes you don’t know yourself as well as you think you do and sometimes, even when you’re willing to die for the man you love, you can be surprised by him—and even discover that you love someone else or discover the man you love can suddenly not love you.

Q. David, how interchangeable do you see the four young lovers being?
A. Most people think the lovers are a foursome and indistinguishable from each other, except by height and other physical characteristics. I think of putting Demetrius in military garb, which shows a social connection with history and the past, and of Lysander as more bohemian. I think that helps tell the story on stage. I think there are differences between them. But they don’t appear interchangeable because they’re alike; they’re interchangeable because they’re human—and at any point we can change what we think. In Comedy of Errors, there’s something wonderful about Antipholus of Syracuse and Antipholus of Ephesus being different characters but in
the minds of all, completely interchangeable. I think it’s the secret of that show. And I feel that about the lovers, too. I think that Helena is practical and yearning and has a very bad self-image. Hermia is a little spoiled, has a great self-image and totally romantic and impractical. It is the clarity with which they see the differences in each other that make coming to confusion in the forest all the more fun. The fact that the one with no self-image is suddenly beset by two lovers—and if the same thing had happened to Hermia, she would have objected with, “Oh, no, don’t do that, not in front of Helena, she’ll be upset…” But Helena with her low self-image, immediately goes to, “Oh, you’re kidding, you’re making fun of me.” That response is not one that Hermia would have had. So I think Shakespeare’s embracing the differences in them and ultimately saying that their differences still don’t make them either unworthy or worthy of being loved.

Q. Apart from inciting the whole rift between Oberon and Titania, what role does the little Indian boy play in this story?

A. It’s interesting that, in the script, he never appears on-stage. Once the plot progresses, he’s hardly mentioned again until he’s finally surrendered to Oberon, but almost as an afterthought. Again, I think Shakespeare’s getting at the idea that we arbitrarily put our affections wherever we put our affections. And we choose life or death or battle over things that, if we really thought about it or thought it through, we might not. Our choice is not as important as we think it is. When you’re under the influence of the flower, it seems like the truth to you. Through enchantment, Bottom becomes an ass and Titania falls in love with him. And yes, there’s an antidote for it but, again, affection is an arbitrary enchantment.

Q. Are the enchanted feelings “real”?

A. Bottom has still experienced the love of Titania. That doesn’t diminish. It lives in that place of dreams. The dream part, I think, is really equally important to what we understand as our reality. We have intonations of our other selves when we sleep, when we dream. They’re part fantasies, they’re part wishes of that thing you could be, and they’re part revelation of what’s really going on.

Q. We haven’t talked yet about the Mechanicals.

A. I think it helps if the Mechanicals are still young. They still believe the illusions. I’m looking at placing our production in the Edwardian/Victorian period, but in America—a time and place where there is a rigid exterior of what is appropriate. I’m imagining them as schoolboys, innocent, anxious to put on this play, and a monsignor, I think, a teacher who loves the theater. I always think of a professor I know, who just sits in the front row and mouths the words and cries every time he’s supposed to; he is the best audience to his own work of anyone I know and I love that about him. So imagine a Peter Quince that is like that: who loves the work that he’s doing, who loves his students, and then shepherding them through what that experience is of putting on a play. Bottom as an adult can come off as the loudmouth, obnoxious one, but in context of a school, he’s the one who’s brilliant and has the most to offer the future. There’s this sense that he’s being tolerantly led to enlightenment, and the big moment of his enlightenment that changes his life is this encounter in the forest. And you feel at end of it that he’s somehow going to see his destiny because of that encounter with Titania. So on one level, Oberon intends the act to be mean-spirited. It is an act of revenge. But like the Shakespeare I think I know, everything can be transformed by that encounter, in a way that is enlightening and positive and exciting, and hopeful about the future. That’s why any one of us go to an amateur production, not to see the show well-rendered, but to see those people who love the show render it with the love. I always call it the courage of an amateur.

When the lovers wake up out of the dream, they are transformed. They see with their true eyes who they really love. All of a sudden that language of consternation that fills the entire play up until the very end of Act 4, suddenly dissipates. After they wake up, two lines later everything is well and we’re all going to a triple wedding. I find that fascinating. It is as if Shakespeare is saying about those things that we hold at a price dearer than life, wait awhile, grow up, open your eyes; that there’s not much worth dying for and this, in particular, is probably not worth dying for. Underlying this entire story there’s this sense that “things change,” that those things that seem set in stone and create tumult simply evaporate or work themselves out.

Q. Based on what you’ve said about Bottom—that though he doesn’t fully remember the dream and it’s no longer part of his life, it is in him and it’s affected him—are Hermia and Lysander changed in some way by the dream—even though they ended up loving the same person as before?

A. I think significantly. They suddenly relax. What makes Hermia idealistic and silly and Lysander poetic and silly, suddenly that just drops away. They have, in the course of this one evening, matured into an understanding of what love is and who each others are—and they also have borne hurts that make them wiser, smarter. And even though they only vaguely
remember the dream, that’s its value. They are affected by it. We see them as mature individuals at the other end of a very strange journey.

Q. You will be doubling both “royal couples,” as well as the Mechanicals and the Fairies. The practicality of doubling is obvious and the tradition of doubling is well known. But for you does the doubling symbolize anything?

A. It does. Certainly Theseus, Hippolyta and Philostrate doubling with Titania, Oberon and Puck is the completion of the Titania and Oberon journey. It’s a renewal of their vows in the eyes of the audience, and you end up with finishing the plot of Titania and Oberon with the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta; Theseus and Hippolyta, otherwise, are bit players. It is an amazing to me how standard this practice of doubling these four characters has become, whereas prior to the 1968 Peter Brook version, it wasn’t at all a standard convention. But once Brook discovered that parallel, no one wants to let it go because it’s there and resonant. But I think the other doubling between the Mechanicals and the Fairies is resonant, too. I think that we lose the Mechanicals and they exist in an orbit of their own once Bottom gets sucked into the world of the forest and is introduced to Titania. By “becoming” the Fairies, they’re also present in the Titania scenes, and they get to participate in this miracle. And because Egeus is Peter Quince’s double, there’s no one who has not experienced that midsummer night’s dream in the forest. Everybody is changed, transformed. They have all learned.

Q. Should we in the audience be conscious of the doubling throughout?

A. The doubling is deliberate and there is a subliminal connection, but it’s not going to be literal. In The Wizard of Oz, at the moment Dorothy wakes up in her bed and sees her family and friends around her, she says, “You were there, and you were there.” And even though Zeke has no memory of being the Scarecrow, the audience makes the connection that Zeke was part of the dream. You build the dream around faces you know.

Q. David, when you said that they have all learned, will you talk more about what they do learn?

A. All of the principle characters are in opposition. As a matter of fact, Lysander and Hermia are the only ones who aren’t—until their world turns on its head and they become enemies. You have Theseus and Hippolyta that are deadly enemies. You have Titania and Oberon that are in the middle of a deadly fight. You have Demetrius and Helena who aren’t talking to each other. Shakespeare’s so good at creating a world that reflects his theme or his point of view—the world of couples in opposition who evolve into understanding over the course of this one magical night. It’s profound, it’s wonderful.

Q. Talk more about why opposition is so important—both in this story and in our lives.

A. When they wake up, there is a maturity that has been gained by living through opposition so that their relationships are enriched. There’s this wonderful sense that everyone has matured over the course of this night in the woods, and because they have weathered the storm of enmity in their relationship, their relationships are stronger.

I think that Shakespeare is saying a few things about relationships. One is that they have their ups and downs. And that person that you think you hate may evolve into the person you love tomorrow. Relationships evolve. In the passions of a moment, we can believe very firmly and completely one thing, but over the course of whatever confusion, crisis, collision we experience with other people, that can evolve into something totally unexpected. When I directed this play before, it was fun and great and nontraditional, but it’s so much more complex than that. I think that Shakespeare is asking us not to judge our experience. Have it. Don’t predict who you’re going to like, just like who you like. And that, to me, is a profound statement of now, an incredibly modern statement.

Elizabeth Ledo as Sigmund Freud/Puck in CST’s 2012 Production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Directed by Gary Griffin
Before You Read the Play

AS A CLASS

1. **BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION**

Create the beginnings of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* blog on your class website to which you can add as you read and discuss the play. *(To the teacher: Don’t yet have a class blog? Check out [http://www.kidblog.org](http://www.kidblog.org), a free and simple website for teachers to create class blogs.)*

Before you read the play, start by posting images or words that represent anything you already know or think about *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. As you study the play, add videos, headlines, articles, songs, etc. that remind you of characters, events, key objects, words, or anything else you feel is relevant to your reading. You’ll find more Bard Blog suggestions throughout this “Classroom Activities” section. As a class, discuss why you added a particular piece to the Bard Blog.

**Guiding Questions:**
- What words or images come to your mind when you hear *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*?
- What do you already know about this play?
- What words would you list to best describe Shakespeare?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1, W6, W10**

2. **TRAGEDY IN COMEDY?**

Shakespeare, like most good writers, chose the opening moments for his plays with some thought about the story that followed them. In one way or another, they end up telling us a lot about the world we’re about to enter. But for a comedy, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* starts off very oddly! Within moments of the play’s beginning, a character by the name of Egeus brings his daughter to the Duke to find out if he may have her killed if she refuses to marry his husband of choice. Why would something that’s called a “comedy” start off by talking about “disposal” of a daughter? As a group, brainstorm some possibilities. Start getting some questions up on the board that you want answered, just based on Egeus’s lines:

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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
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Consider going back to a couple of other stories you’ve finished recently and see if their first moments suggest anything about the author’s “deck of cards” that gets revealed as the story plays itself out.

**Guiding Questions:**
- What do you already know about “comedy” from watching TV sitcoms or movies? What do you know from reading other Shakespeare comedies?
- What elements do you think a story must have for it to be called a comedy?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R2**
3. SOUND AND SENSE

(To the teacher: Excerpt from the play one line for each student. If helpful, see our suggestions below. Choose lines that are rich in Shakespeare’s language or are descriptive of character. Distribute a line to each student on a slip of paper, not revealing the character who spoke it. Since the students have not yet begun to read the play, the focus here is not on the characters themselves but rather on the language that the characters speak.)

Here are some suggestions:

I would my father looked but with my eyes. (Hermia, 1.1)

You shall go with me; I have some private schooling for you both. (Theseus, 1.1)

How happy some o’er other some can be! (Helena, 1.1)

Nay, faith, let not me play a woman. I have a beard coming.” (Flute, 1.2)

We will meet, and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains. Be perfect. Adieu. (Bottom, 1.2)

Over hill, over dale, / Thorough bush, thorough brier, / Over park, over pale, / I do wander everywhere / Swifter than the moon’s sphere. (Fairy, 2.1)

I jest to Oberon and make him smile / When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile, / Neighing in likeness of a filly foal. (Puck, 2.1)

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. (Oberon, 2.1)

“I’ll run from thee and hide me in the brakes, / And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.” (Demetrius, 2.1)

I mean that my heart unto yours is knit so that but one heart we can make of it.” (Lysander, 2.2)

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. (Quince, 3.1)

I am a spirit of no common rate. (Titania, 3.1)

Look at your line(s), and as you begin to walk around the room, say it aloud again and again without addressing anyone. Let the nature of the line and the way you say it affect the rhythm and pace at which you walk around the room. Say your line for at least five other people, and listen closely as they share their line with you.

Continue walking around the room, silently, making eye contact with each person you pass. Now begin investigating different ways of moving with these prompts:

• Pick up and slow down pace. If “1” is slow motion and “5” is running, start at a “3.” Each time you take on a new pace, say your line to at least one other student. Slow down to a “2.” Speed up to a “4.” Back to “3.” Down to “1,” etc.

• Alter your posture. Walk upright with your chest out. Hunch your shoulders. Strut with swagger. Shuffle your feet. Fold your arms. Swing your arms freely by your side. Each time you explore a new posture, say your line to at least one other student.

• Change your status. If “1” is the lowest status in a society and “10” is royalty, begin walking at a “5.” Now change to a “10.” What does a “1” feel like? Continue repeating your line to a fellow student each time you switch your status.
Now regroup in a circle, each student in turn delivering his or her line to a classmate opposite him or her in the circle, at the pace, posture, and status level that feels best to you. Sit down as a group and discuss the lines. Remember that this is an idea or brainstorming session; begin to imagine the world of the play you've just entered.

**Guiding Questions:**
- What do you imagine about the character who speaks your line?
- Are there lines that might possibly have been spoken by the same character?
- What pace felt best with your line? What size? What status?
- Did any sounds of the words you spoke aloud in your line tell you anything about the emotions of the character?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, SL1**

### CREATIVE DEFINITIONS

*(To the teacher: Excerpt several lines from the play and write them on the board, or create a handout with the lines written on it. See suggestions below.)* It can be helpful to play with the sound of Shakespeare's language to discover the meaning of the words and thoughts. Begin by reading a couple of lines from the play as a class. Write down any words that may be unfamiliar to you. Sit in a circle. Say the lines one word at a time clockwise around the circle so that every student is responsible for one word. Once everyone knows what his or her word is, begin to play with the line. Start by turning your head to the right until the person before you say his or her word. Then turn your head quickly to the left and say your word loudly to the next person. Make your words sound different each time around, with the following prompts:

- Stretch out the vowel sounds.
- Exaggerate the consonant sounds.
- Speed through the line.
- Go in slow motion.
- Whisper the words.

After you get through the line a few times, discuss what you discovered as a class. If there are words that are still unclear, arm two to three students with “dueling” copies of lexicons to define words that are unfamiliar (David and Ben Crystal’s *Shakespeare’s Words* recommended, or you can visit their online version at [http://www.shakespeareswords.com](http://www.shakespeareswords.com)). These dueling “lexicon masters” can turn tedious vocabulary searches into an active and competitive sport.

Here are some suggestions:

* I would my father looked but with my eyes. / Rather your eyes must with his judgment look. (Hermia / Theseus, 1.1)

* The King doth keep his revels here tonight. / Take heed the Queen come not within his sight. (Puck, 2.1)

* The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid / Will make or man or woman madly dote / Upon the next live creature that it sees. (Oberon, 2.1.)

**Guiding Questions:**
- How does saying a word various ways help you understand its meaning?
- How would you define your word differently after this activity?
- What influence do the sounds of the words have on their meaning?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L4, R1, R4**
3. **PUNCTUATION THROUGH MOVEMENT**

Take a short passage from the play on a sheet you can mark up. Turn to your neighbor and take turns saying the monologue out loud. Talk to each other about anything that you find confusing about the text. Afterwards, circle all “full-stop” punctuation—the questions marks, exclamation marks and periods. Begin to walk through the space saying the words aloud. Whenever you come to one of the punctuation marks you have circled, come to a complete stop. Change directions and continue on to the next sentence. Do this a couple times through.

Return to your partner and discuss what has become clearer from stopping on the full-stop punctuation marks. Discuss where the major thoughts begin and end. Regroup as a class and discuss what you talked about with your partner. Watch a few volunteers demonstrate the activity. Discuss what you observed and share any new clarity you may have on the meaning of the passage. Break down the major thoughts in the text. Write as simply as possible the meaning of the passage. (To the teacher: If space is limited, modify by bringing one or two students up at a time to demonstrate the activity at the front of the classroom. See passage suggestions below.)

*Full of vexation come I…Turned her obedience, which is due to me, to stubborn harshness.* (Egeus 1.1)

*Thou speakest aright;…But room, Fairy: here comes Oberon.* (Puck, 2.1)

*Wherefore was I to this keen mockery born?…Should of another therefore be abused!* (Helena 2.2)

*O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!…this seal of bliss!* (Demetrius 3.2)

*Puppet? Why so? ….But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.* (Hermia 3.2)

**Guiding Questions:**
- What becomes clearer when you must change direction at each full stop?
- How might this help us read Shakespeare’s verse?
- What are the major thoughts in your speech?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L1, R1, R5**

6. **IAMBIC PENTAMETER**

Much of Shakespeare’s verse is written in iambic pentameter, or ten-syllable lines with alternating unstressed and stressed syllables. The ten unstressed/stressed beats mirror the cadence of the English language. Say these everyday sentences out loud and listen for the iambic pentameter rhythm:

*I’m hungry and I want my dinner now.*

*The weather’s gorgeous and I have to go outside.*

*I really want to see my friends tonight.*
Now take a look at a passage from the play. In Act 2, scene 1, Titania says to Oberon:

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 paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or in the beached margin of the sea
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind.

Read these lines aloud, trying to overemphasize the meter. If you’re having trouble, look at the example below, in which the meter is stressed:

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 PAVed FOUNTain OR by RUSHy BROOK,
Or IN the BEACHed MARgent OF the SEA
To DANCE our RINGlets TO the WHISTling WIND.

Say the passage above aloud and exaggerate the stress. Try tapping the rhythm out on your knee at the same time to feel the rhythm. Once you have the hang of the meter, experiment with writing a few of your own lines in iambic pentameter. Write your favorite children’s story or nursery rhyme in ten lines, all in iambic pentameter. Use your new tools—exaggeration when speaking and tapping—to make sure you keep the meter. Share your verse-tale with the class. “It may be harder than it seems to be…”

Guiding Questions:
• Can you come up with an everyday sentence in English in iambic pentameter?
• What is the effect in reversing the stressed and unstressed meter?
• Do you think iambic pentameter would work well with a different language you are studying or one that you speak at home?

INSULTS AND IMPROV

You know how sometimes it just makes you feel better when you’ve said a word or two to someone in anger? Words were developed to help us express feelings—and release feelings (and some words just by their very sound are better able to do that than others). As you read, find as many of the insults in the play as you can (hint: check Act 3, scene 2!) or see our suggestions below. In groups of four to six, practice aloud—at each other with feeling!–the insults that characters from A Midsummer Night’s Dream sling at each other. If the meaning of a word is not clear, don’t get stuck! Keep repeating the insult and you’ll be closer to the meaning than you might think. Take Hamlet’s advice to the Players: ‘Suit the action to the word, the word to the action’ and choose a physical gesture to accompany the insult as you say it.

Now, think of a modern situation in which someone might use the insult you’ve chosen. Put together a short scene portraying your situation. Incorporate the insult with the physical gesture into the scene. Make sure your scene, like Shakespeare’s, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Act out your scene for other groups in the class. Discuss the similarities that arise from the different scenes.
You are that shrewd and knavish sprite (2.1)

Tarry, rash wanton! Am not I thy lord? (2.1)

…you hardhearted adamant (2.1)

O, how fit a word / is that vile name to perish on my sword! (2.2)

Out, dog! Out, cur! (3.2)

…with doubler tongue / than thine, thou serpent, adder never stung (3.2)

Injurious Hermia, most ungrateful maid! (3.2)

Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! Vile thing, let loose… (3.2)

You juggler, you cankerblossom! You thief of love! (3.2)

She was a vixen when she went to school, /and though she be but little, she is fierce. (3.2)

Get you gone, you dwarf! / You minimus, of hindering knotgrass made! / You bead, you acorn! (3.2)

Lord, what fools these mortals be! (3.2)

Guiding Questions:
• What may these insults indicate about the events in the plot? About the characters in the play?
• How can gestures and movement enhance meaning for audience members?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L4, R1, SL1

PROBLEM SITUATIONS

In small groups, choose one of the following scenarios below that characters from A Midsummer Night’s Dream find themselves in throughout the story. Discuss with your group the different options your character has and what you would do if you found yourself in that situation. (A special thanks to Dr. Tim Duggan, a regular instructor at CST Teacher Workshops, for this pre-reading suggestion!)

• Your father or mother forbids you from seeing someone that you love because they think that the person is not a good influence on you. What are your options, and what would you do?
• Your boyfriend/girlfriend tells you he/she no longer loves you and is now in love with your best friend. What are your options, and what would you do?
• Your boss or teacher gives you a task and even though you try your best to do it, you completely mess it up. What are your options, and what would you do?
• You have been put in charge of a class project, and one of your fellow classmates keeps trying to take over even though you are supposed to be managing the project. What are your options, and what would you do?

Guiding Questions:
• What personal experiences does your given scenario raise for your group members? How do these experiences help you to identify possible options to explore?
• What process did you group use to determine the most viable option for your given situation?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1
9. PICTURES INTO STORY
(To the teacher: find about five images of different moments from various productions/movies of A Midsummer Night's Dream and give each group a set of pictures. Good go-to sites are IMDB, http://www.imdb.com, for films, and ADHS Performing Arts, http://www.ahds.rhul.ac.uk/ahdscollections/docroot/shakespeare/playslist.do, for theater images—as well as CST’s own site, of course! http://www.chicagoshakes.com/about_us/production_history.)

In small groups, examine each of the five images in your packet. What’s going on and what is the relationship between the people in the picture? Where does the scene take place? What is happening? Take turns looking at the photos and write your responses down by each picture. You can also respond to comments your other group members have already made. After you’ve all had a chance to look at each image, try to arrange the pictures in the order in which you think these scenes occurred.

Guiding Questions:
• Did any of your classmates write something that helped you to make your own connection to a photo?
• How might these scenes be connected? Why does one picture come before another?
• How did your groups’ decision about the order compare with other groups? Would you change your order after hearing the thought process of other groups?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R7

10. FOCUSED FREE-WRITE AND COLLABORATIVE POEM
Before you begin to read A Midsummer Night’s Dream, it’s helpful to think about some of the play’s central ideas as they may relate to your own life and personal experiences. Take a moment to free-write some of your thoughts about one of the following situations:
• Have you ever felt that you and your parents would never see eye-to-eye on an issue? Do you find it difficult sometimes to defend your side of the argument?
• Who was your best friend growing up? Describe him/her. What made him/her so special to you? Write about a time when you felt particularly close to this person. How would you have felt if this person were no longer your friend? Did any external forces ever gotten in the way of that friendship?
• Supernatural events are a big part of pop culture today. Are you superstitious? Do you believe in magic? Have you ever seen or experienced something you couldn’t explain? What happened?
• Have you ever had a dream that seemed so incredibly real that it was hard to shake, and perhaps even affected how you thought about something or someone long after the dream ended? Did you have to wrestle with what was real and what belonged only to your dream state?
• Have you ever felt so strongly about someone that you felt like your behavior was being completely controlled by your heart and not at all by your head? Maybe you were in love? Or “in hate?” Write about a time when you decided to do something based solely on your emotions. How did you feel before the event? What about during and after?

In groups of three, read what you wrote to your classmates. After each reading, underline the words or phrases that stood out to your fellow classmates. Choose one of these underlined phrases to donate to a collaborative class poem. Sit in a circle or U-shape and speak the lines in turn, with a contribution from each student.

Guiding Questions:
• What predictions can you make about the play based on this activity?
• Were there any repeated ideas or themes in the collaborative class poem?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, SL6, W10
As You Read the Play

11. **BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION**

As you begin to enter Shakespeare’s text, continue building on your Bard Blog. Use these ideas to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

- Choose a character to follow throughout the play and write diary entries from that character’s point of view. Share your thoughts and feelings as the character, incorporating quotations from the text whenever you can. Be creative! Rather than observing him or her from the outside, try to get at the heart of your character. Check out an example of one for the character of Hermia at http://hermiasdiary.blogspot.com.

- At the end of each act, list five of the major characters in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Write a single sentence for each that begins, "What I most want is…” Take a risk—there’s not just one right answer! Then write a sentence for each character that begins, "What I’m most afraid of is…” (Is there ever a situation when what one most wants is also what one most fears?)

- Create a character discussion forum after reading Act 1, scene 1 when a wide range of characters, from dukes to citizens, old men to young women, prisoners of war to prisoners of propriety is introduced. Post one or two lines that exemplify a character of your choice. Add an image that defines your character. Be creative!

- Ask students to create a graphic design on http://www.wordle.net based on Helena’s definition of “love” from her monologue in Act 1, scene 1 “How happy some o’er other some can be!…” As you read the play, follow up with blog posts on how the strong feelings of love set the action of the plot in motion.

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, W3, W6, W10**

Act 1

**IN SMALL GROUPS**

12. **THESEUS AND HIPPOLYTA’S RELATIONSHIP**

Read through the first twenty lines of Act 1, scene 1 in pairs, each person taking a part. In your **first read-through**, read slowly and circle any words that are confusing to you. In your **second read-through**, read your lines as though this is an exchange between a loving couple looking forward to their wedding day. In your **third read-through**, read your lines as though this scene is a tense moment between two powerful enemies. With your partner, determine if there are other ways that this scene could be read and read through a fourth time, trying out your idea. Stage your version for the class, and discuss the various approaches.

**Guiding Questions:**
- What do you discover about Theseus and Hippolyta’s relationship from observing your peers?
- How does the way this scene is presented affect the action that ensues?
- What interpretation would you choose as a director, and why?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L5, R1, R6**

13. **MOVEMENT AND TEXT**

As a class, read through Egeus’s speech that begins with “Full of vexation come I….” Working in small groups, underline the words that strike you most—one per line. After you’ve determined your words, decide on a gesture that connects a
physical movement to the meaning and/or emotion behind each word you chose. Once you and your group agree upon the words and movement, practice saying the speech in unison. Try to match your voice to the meaning behind the word and gesture. Present your work to the class. Discuss what you learned from watching your peers. (To the teacher: watch a video clip of this activity in action with an instructor and his students from the Royal Shakespeare Company at http://tinyurl.com/rsctextandmovement.)

Guiding Questions:
- Why did a particular word strike you more than other words did?
- When you watched the other groups, did other words stand out to you? Did you understand any words differently?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R4

INTRODUCING THE MECHANICALS
One can find all types of characters in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Immediately following the Court scene with Duke Theseus, we are introduced to a group of workers, often referred to as the “Mechanicals.” Though the Mechanicals are often thought of as a group, actors must work to ensure that each is a distinct individual when performing for an audience. In groups of six, choose one character per person to follow as you read the scene aloud. As you read, search for clues that illuminate your individual character. As a class, share your discoveries about each of the characters in this group.

Guiding Questions:
- What is your character’s profession? What characteristics are associated with people of that profession?
- How often does your character speak throughout the scene? What might the volume or scarcity of lines tell you about your character?
- How does the text structure and vocabulary of this scene compare with the first? What might that tell you about the world of the Mechanicals?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L5, R1, R5

OFFSTAGE ACTION AND SCRIPT-WRITING
In Act 1, scene 1, after Theseus has laid down the law for Hermia, he says, “But, Demetrius, come / and come, Egeus, you shall go with me; / I have some private schooling for you both.” What do you think Theseus says to Demetrius and Egeus in this “private schooling” session? Working in pairs, write out a brief script for this missing scene. Pass your scene to another group in the class who will act it out.

Guiding Questions:
- What clues in the text can you use to help you write your scene?
- What other action in the play is indicated by the text but not staged?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, W3
ON YOUR OWN

16. INTERNAL MONOLOGUES VOICED
Silence in Shakespeare is often just as important as speech—just as it is when we choose to be silent among others. In Act 1, scene 1, both Hippolyta and Hermia stand mostly silent while the men discuss their lives and futures. Choose one of these characters and write their internal monologue—that is, everything that they're not saying. Actors often do this on stage as they listen and respond to the other characters and events in the scene. Hermia's fate is in the hands of others. We are unclear of Hippolyta's attitude towards her imminent marriage to Theseus, and in performance the interpretations of Hippolyta in this scene are wildly divergent. Write the thoughts both women keep to themselves, and incorporate quotes from the text to make it clear how their thoughts connect to what's being spoken aloud by the men.

Guiding Questions:
• What might Hermia and Hippolyta's silence indicate about the society represented in this play?
• Is there any point at which you could make the choice that Hermia or Hippolyta try to speak, but are silenced?
• How does the act of writing an internal monologue help actors know what to do when they are not saying lines?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, W3

17. SIMILES AND METAPHORS
Shakespeare, like all great writers, uses metaphor and simile to establish character and motivation. Start keeping your own personal catalog of metaphors. To get you started, think about these questions: If you were a time of day, what would you be? How about a period in history? A type of car? A song? Discuss your best metaphor with the class. Why is it a good metaphor? What does it imply? How could you write it using Shakespeare's language?

Now, in pairs, create a list of metaphors said by one of the characters in the play. Here's an example that Theseus says in the very first moments of the play, "This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires, / Like to a step-dame or a dowager / Long withering out a young man's revenue." Start your catalog by collecting Shakespeare's associations, but feel free to include your own!

Guiding Questions:
• Which characters employ metaphors and similes in their speech most often? Why might this say about these characters?
• What is the dramatic effect of using metaphor, simile and personification?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L5, R4, W10

18. DRAMATIC PROGRESSION THROUGH SCENE TITLES
One of the best ways to get at the "through-line" or dramatic progression in a play is to give each scene a name or title that captures the heart of the action. Directors often use this technique to help actors (and themselves) during the rehearsal process. Give each of the scenes in Act 1 a name or title that you feel gets at the essence of the scene. Be as creative and specific as you can in naming each scene. Then share your titles with your classmates—which you might want to also consider creating a tableau to represent. (To the teacher: Consider repeating this activity through each act as you read the play.)

Guiding Questions:
• How do the titles clarify and summarize the dramatic progression?
• What themes become more apparent when writing the titles?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, W10
Act 2

AS A CLASS

19. WORD EMPHASIS AND “SUBTEXT”

This exercise will help you get used to reading not only the text of Shakespeare’s play, but also the “subtext”—the character’s inner feelings beneath the text that influences actions, behavior and tone. An actor can change the entire meaning of a line by changing the words that he or she chooses to accentuate—just as we do in everyday conversation! Read the following sentence written on the board—“I’m glad you’re here this evening.” What does it mean? Discuss it with your classmates, and don’t be afraid to state the obvious. Now, elect six classmates to read the sentence, each person stressing a different word every time. Listen to how the meaning changes with each different reader. Now try the same exercise with Titania’s line from Act 2, scene 1, “The Fairyland buys not the child of me”:

The Fairyland buys not the child of me.
The Fairyland buys not the child of me.
The Fairyland buys not the child of me.
The Fairyland buys not the child of me.
The Fairland buys not the child of me.
The Fairland buys not the child of me.

Below are some other lines to consider:

Yet Hermia still loves you; then be content. (Helena, 2.2)
This is the woman, but not this the man. (Puck, 3.2)
I understand not what you mean by this (Hermia, 3.2)

Guiding Questions:
• How does emphasis on different words change your understanding of the line’s meaning?
• How does the mood of the line change with different readings?
• Are there multiple “right” ways to say this line? If so, what does that mean for the actor?
• How would you direct the actress playing Titania to deliver the line?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R4, SL3

20. IMAGERY IN LANGUAGE AND MOVEMENT

Look at Titania’s monologue in Act 2, scene 1, “These are the forgeries of jealousy.” This is one of the most image-rich speeches in the whole play, and in it, Shakespeare asks his audience to use their imaginations to help realize the story. Close your eyes and listen to an audio recording—http://tinyurl.com/titaniaaudio—as a class.

• Listen closely for imagery, and raise your hand any time the speech brings a picture to your mind.
• Listen to the audio recording again—this time, have the text in front of you to mark up. Circle all words and phrases that connect to your senses—smells, sounds and colors.
• Listen to the audio recording a final time, still with the text in front of you. This time, underline all metaphors, comparisons where words or phrases symbolize another to suggest a likeness, or an analogy, of a different object or idea.
Discuss the overall mood of the passage. In small groups, agree on a single word, phrase or line to bring to life through a “living sculpture” of bodies. As your group creates this sculpture, you will notice just how many details Shakespeare includes in each image. Take turns directing, or “chiseling,” the sculpture. Revise until the sculpture closely represents the imagery and intention. Present your final sculpture to the rest of the class. See if they can guess which word, phrase, or line you selected.

**Guiding Questions:**
- What are the most memorable mental pictures?
- What mood or tone does the imagery give the speech? What words or phrases indicate the mood particularly strongly?
- Is there a pattern or a theme among the chosen words, phrases and lines?
- Based on the sculptures presented by your classmates, what could we say this speech is about?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L5, R4, SL2**

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### 21. CHANGELING BOY: AN INVISIBLE ACTOR

The changeling boy that instigates Titania and Oberon’s fight does not appear in Shakespeare’s original *dramatis personae*. But some directors choose to represent him onstage with a child. How do you think it would affect the audience’s attitude toward their fight to have the source of the conflict on the stage? What are some things that the actor portraying the changeling boy could do to shift sympathies toward Titania? Toward Oberon? How might his looks and age affect the audience’s point of view? Working in pairs, create a page or two of a graphic novel depicting Oberon and Titania’s first encounter in Act 2, scene 1, “Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania!” Decide whether or not to include the changeling boy. Share your graphic novel pages with your classmates, and discuss the different interpretations. After you see CST’s production, re-evaluate your earlier predictions!

**Guiding Questions:**
- How might the inclusion of the changeling boy onstage affect our response to this scene?
- What are some possible reasons that Shakespeare might have left the changeling boy off his original *dramatis personae*?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, SL1, SL2**

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### 22. DIRECTING CHARACTER MOTIVATION

There can be vast differences in the ways actors portray a scene, differences made possible by different ideas about character motivation and the “subtext” of a scene—that is, what’s felt by the characters underneath their spoken lines. Take a close look at Hermia and Lysander’s interaction in Act 2, scene 2, starting at this line: “Fair love, you faint with wandering in the wood…”

Working in teams of three (two actors and a director), read the scene out loud once. Then, try it again with each of the following directions:

- *Hermia is exhausted and Lysander sex-starved.*
- *Hermia is flirtatious and Lysander frustrated.*
- *Hermia is truly modest and Lysander full of adoration.*

How does our understanding of the scene alter with the changes in subtext? Director, take note of the change in the movement and vocal intonation your actors make from one interpretation to the next. Jot down which version seems to work best. As a group, reflect on the scene work and decide which version is most strongly supported by the text. Then, as a group, translate the dialogue into everyday language, inserting the actual thoughts that are going through Hermia and Lysander’s heads.
Now try Titania and Oberon’s meeting in Act 2, scene 1, starting with: “Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.” Once you’ve read through the scene once for comprehension, add on one of the following subtexts:

- Titania is disdainful and Oberon loving.
- Titania misses Oberon immensely and he is hard-hearted.
- Titania and Oberon both can’t stand that they’re fighting.
- Titania and Oberon are both furious.

Other great scenes to approach with different interpretations include:

- Bottom and Quince’s discussion of playing Pyramus. Quince: “An you should do it too terribly…” (Act 1, scene 2)
- Oberon’s awakening of Titania. Oberon: “Dian’s bud o’er Cupid’s flower…” (Act 4 scene 1)
- Theseus and Hippolyta’s discovery of the young lovers. Egeus: “My lord, this is my daughter here asleep.” (Act 4 scene 1)

Directors, feel free to be creative with your subtext direction. Actors, don’t be afraid to take risks and make big choices!

Guiding Questions:
- What words or phrases become more or less important with each interpretation?
- For the actors: What did you have to do with your body and voice to make your subtext clear?
- For the directors: When the subtext wasn’t clear, what suggestions did you give to the actors to help them communicate more clearly?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L5, R4, R6

IN SMALL GROUPS

23. CHARACTER CLUES

The study of character contributes much to our understanding of a play. More often than not, we learn about an individual character’s personality and temperament by way of: (1) what the character says about himself or herself; (2) what others say about the character; (3) what the character does; and (4) what the character says about others. Look, for example, at the opening of Act 2, scene 1, between Fairy and Puck. In pairs, read the scene aloud beginning with “How now, spirit; whither wander you?” to “And here my mistress. Would that he were gone!” Underline or highlight any lines that offer new information about the character of Puck. Discuss what you discovered. Try this whenever a new character is introduced in the play…

Guiding Questions:
- What does the Fairy help us to understand about the character of Puck—and about the world of the fairies and their interactions with mortals?
- What are your first impressions of Puck based on his distinctive way of speaking? What patterns do you notice in his speech?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL2
Act 3

AS A CLASS

24. SHAKESPEARE’S STRUCTURE

Shakespeare writes in iambic pentameter throughout much of the play, but certain characters speak exclusively in prose. It’s visually easy to tell the two forms apart as they appear on the page: verse begins at the left margin each time with a capitalized letter and a raggedy right margin, while prose goes all the way across the page with normal capitalization and even “justified” margins on both left and right. Take a look at Act 3, scene 1. Who speaks in verse? Who speaks in prose—and why do you think they don’t speak in verse? Sometimes characters speak in shortened meter (fewer than ten syllables per line) for several lines. Find the places where this occurs. What do they have in common? Why do you think Shakespeare may have written these lines differently? Discuss your findings.

Guiding Questions:
• What similarities can you find between characters who speak mostly verse in this scene and those who speak mostly in prose? Does the text structure suggest anything about a character’s social status and/or their emotional state?

IN SMALL GROUPS

25. ACTING WITH CUE LINES

In Elizabethan times, playwrights were often finishing a play even as it went into rehearsal. In a society where stealing plays from rival theater groups was a common occurrence, very few copies of the full script existed—and these were closely guarded! Actors were not given copies of the entire play, but were often just given copies of their own character’s lines, with a sentence or so from the end of the speech preceding theirs so they would know when to speak. These lines were called “cue lines,” and the indication that it is an actor’s turn to speak is known as his “cue.” Having only his own lines and just a few cues forced an actor to listen carefully to what his fellow actors were saying. Divide into pairs, and decide who will Demetrius and who will play Hermia. Each of the two scripts below contain the full script for your character and the cue line for your scene partner. Begin acting the scene with your partner, and listen closely for your cue to speak. (To the teacher: This cue lines format can be used for any scene you would like to explore more closely.)

Teacher Resource Center

If you have an activity or lesson plan that was a classroom success with your students, we want to hear about it! Consider donating your lesson plan to the Teacher Resource Center, and become part of our ever-growing, permanent collection! Need inspiration? If you are looking for the perfect activity or “proven” lesson plan, visit the Center to access hundred of teaching resources.

Call the Education Department, 312.595.5678, to make an appointment.
DEMETRIUS Cue Script:

O, why rebuke you him that loves you so?
Lay breath so bitter on your bitter foe.

-----------so dead, so grim.

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.

-----------thou give him me?
I had rather give his carcass to my hounds.

-----------never adder stung.

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.

-----------that he is well.
And if I could, what should I get therefor?
-----------be dead or no.

HERMIA Cue Script:

----------- on your bitter foe.

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 stol'n 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.

----------- in her glimmering sphere.

What's this to my Lysander? Where is he?
Ah, good Demetrius, wilt thou give him me?

----------- carcass to my hounds.

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 double tongue
Than thine, thou serpent, never adder stung.

----------- that I can tell.

I pray thee, tell me then that he is well.

----------- should I get therefor?

A privilege, never to see me more;
And from thy hated presence part I so.
See me no more whether he be dead or no.
As you listen closely for your cue, you may hear other language that you might have missed in reading. Share your discoveries with your partner.

Guiding Questions:
- What do you learn about your character from what he or she says in the scene? What do you learn about your character from what your scene partner says about you?
- Are you able to follow the action using only the cues and lines given?
- What did you hear more clearly when listening that you may have missed when reading every line?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL1

SHARED LINES
Shakespeare’s texts contain many clues to help actors better understand their parts. You’ll notice that some capitalized verse lines in A Midsummer Night’s Dream are indented from the left margin, starting well to the right of other lines. This is one half of what is called a “shared line,” and it happens when two speakers share the ten beats (or sometimes eleven) in a line. When actors come across a shared line, this prompts that the two lines be delivered as one, with no pause between the end of one character’s line and the beginning of the next.

In groups of four, decide who will take on the roles of Hermia, Helena, Demetrius and Lysander. Read through an excerpt of Act 3, scene 2, beginning with Helena’s line “If you have any pity, grace or manners, / You would not make me such an argument.” and ending with Lysander’s line “Be certain, nothing truer—‘tis no jest / That I do hate thee and love Helena.” After your first read-through, recap with your group what you understand about the relationships between the lovers at this moment in the story. Who is in love with whom? Who is under the spell of Oberon’s magic flower? Also with your group, identify and underline all of the shared lines you can find in this excerpt.

Read through your scene a second time. This time, when you reach a shared line, practice jumping in as soon as your scene partner has finished their line. For a challenge, you can also use a ball (like a hot potato!) for this activity to throw back and forth as you “toss” the lines to each other. Discuss what the shared lines suggest about these characters’ emotions and state of mind in the scene.

Guiding Questions:
- How do shared lines influence the pace of dialogue between characters?
- Think about times when you’ve felt a need to jump in and respond to someone quickly, perhaps even cutting them off. Is there anything similar to that scenario and the circumstances in Act 3, scene 2?
- Where do you see shared lines the most in this play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R5, SL1

OBERON AND PUCK: INVISIBLE ACTION
Throughout the lovers’ lengthy feud in Act 3, scene 2, Puck and Oberon are on stage watching the fray, just as we do from the audience.

Working in small groups, choose a short portion (ten to twenty lines) of this scene. Read through the text once aloud. Decide what the mortals might be doing physically as they fight. Then discuss potential blocking options—the planning out of actors’ movement onstage—for Oberon and Puck as they react to the quarrel at that moment. Remember, since the fairies are invisible to the humans, they can go anywhere and do virtually anything. Are Oberon and Puck laughing at the lovers from a distance? Is Oberon signaling Puck to interact with the lovers to add to the humor (both for the fairies and the audience)? Are Oberon and Puck working as a mischievous team?
Create a drawing for the chunk of text you have been exploring and depict the blocking at that moment. Are Hermia and Helena pulling each other’s hair? Are Demetrius and Lysander kissing Helena’s feet? Is Hermia chasing Lysander? In the midst of this feud, how (if at all) are Oberon and Puck meddling with the mortals? (For the art-challenged among us, feel free to use your best stick figures!) Present your drawing, sharing which lines in the text you selected and why you made the blocking choices you did, particularly for Oberon and Puck. Discuss the different interpretations amongst the groups.

Guiding Questions:
• How does Oberon and Puck’s invisibility impact directorial blocking choices?
• What textual evidence exists of Oberon and Puck’s reactions to the lovers’ quarrel?
• Was there an interpretation that was arguably more strongly supported by the text than others?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL4

FOCUSED FREE-WRITE AND COLLABORATIVE CLASS POEM

Helena and Hermia do not realize that Lysander and Demetrius are drugged in Act 3, scene 2. They feel betrayed by the men and by each other. Helena, in particular, laments the loss of their girlhood friendship. Think about a time when you were forced to choose between groups of friends, or between good friends and your boyfriend or girlfriend. What was the situation? What did you decide to do? Take a moment to free-write about your experience. Compare it to what happens in A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Exchange your free-write with another student. As you read what they wrote, underline the words or phrases that stand out to you. When you receive your free-write back from your classmate, take note of what stood out to them, and choose one of their underlined phrases to donate to a collaborative class poem. Sit in a circle or U-shape and speak the lines in turn, with a contribution from each student.

Guiding Questions:
• Do you empathize more with Helena or Hermia?
• Were there any repeated ideas or themes in the collaborative class poem?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS W3, W9

Act 4

AS A CLASS

INTERACTIVE READING: RECONCILING WITH TITANIA

In Act 4, scene 1, Oberon and Puck begin to resolve the chaos they have caused with their love potion. In this speech, Oberon describes in rich detail his most recent encounter with Titania, in which she gives in (albeit still under the charm of the love potion) to their argument about the changeling boy.

Explore Oberon’s monologue with “jump-in reading,” an interactive and playful way to read closely and make text (described below). Synthesize your thoughts with a free write. Follow with “pointing” (also described below), which leads to the creation of a “found poem” and a new interpretation of the passage.
Part One: Jump-in Reading

• Read Oberon’s monologue aloud as a class, switching readers at each punctuation mark. While listening, mark at least one line or phrase that stands out for you.
• As a class, reread the speech—this time switching readers randomly without assignment or seating order. You can choose to jump in for any length of text you wish to read. Anyone can volunteer to jump in when the previous reader stops. If two readers begin at one time, one simply “yields” to the other. Proceed until the passage has been read a second time.
• Return again to the text. Take a few minutes to mark any lines, phrases, or individual words that stand out after this second reading.
• Choose one word, phrase or line and free-write about why it stands out to you.

Part Two: Pointing (from Sheridan Blau, 2003)

• Pick a line or phrase from the same passage to read out loud—a line that is compelling, interesting, fun, etc. No one “owns” a word, phrase or line, and there is no prescribed order in which lines are to be spoken. Begin reading chosen lines and phrases, listening closely to one another to avoid speaking on top of one another. The same line can be read again and again, creating a choral effect in a type of “found poem.”

OBERON:

Welcome, good Robin. Seest thou this sweet sight?
Her dotage now I do begin to pity;
For, meeting her of late behind the wood
Seeking sweet favors for this hateful fool,
I did upbraid her and fall out with her,
For she his hairy temples then had rounded
With 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 Fairyland.
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
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!
Guiding Questions:
• Why do particular lines stand out for you? Is it the sounds, imagery, word play?
• During which reading did you need to listen most closely?
• How did your understanding of the passage change with each successive reading?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R5, R6, W10

IN SMALL GROUPS

30. “EMBEDDED” STAGE DIRECTIONS IN DIALOGUE
Throughout Shakespeare’s writing, actors can find signals embedded into the script that may inform how they choose to move and speak to create the coherent story. These stage directions can sometimes be found in the character’s own lines or may be spoken by another character (e.g. when Egeus says, “Stand forth, Demetrius” in Act 1, scene 1, it’s a good indication to the actor playing Demetrius that he step forward!)

Act 4, scene 1 begins with Titania and her fairy attendants surrounding Bottom, a transformed donkey. In groups of five students, read through the scene aloud until Oberon’s entrance, marking all lines that indicate when an actor should move. Starting with Titania’s line, “Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed,” get up on your feet and explore possible variations in speaking and movement associated with the spoken stage directions. Present your favorite variation to the class. Play with overemphasizing some of these found stage directions to create comedic moments within the scene.

Guiding Questions:
• How can movement enhance the humor in the scene?
• How greatly did the groups’ interpretations of the scene vary?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R1, SL1

31. NEWS REPORT: MYSTERY DISAPPEARANCES!
The four lovers have been missing from Athens throughout the night. Finding them together and asleep in the woods would be rather extraordinary, especially since Demetrius and Lysander left Athens as sworn enemies and Demetrius unequivocally rejected the idea of reciprocating Helena’s affection ever again. Work in small groups to write a TV news report for a cable news network about the discovery of the two couples and the explanation they provide. Remember that these are four young members of the nobility who have been missing for at least a day. Divide up the members of your group to play the parts of the lovers, the news anchor, and Theseus, Egeus and Hippolyta (if there are enough people). Perform your news broadcast for the class. For extra credit, write the report from the bias of one of the following stations: CNN (sensational breaking news), MSNBC (liberal, feminist), and Fox (conservative, traditional morals).

Guiding Questions:
• What are the different reactions the adults could have to the missing youth? How are their reactions supported by the text?
• What does each younger member believe happened?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R1, W3, W4

ON YOUR OWN

32. FIFTY-WORD SUMMARY
Act 4 concludes and plot points are wrapping up into resolution. Reflect on all that unfolded in Act 4. Working in pairs, bullet point a list of no more than fifteen major events from the first four acts in chronological order. Together, recount the plot in exactly fifty words using your bullet point list as a guide to summarize the events.
Guiding Questions:
• Which plots and subplots are completely resolved by the end of Act 4? Which remain to be resolved?
• Which events were included in all or most groups’ summaries?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, W2

Act 5

AS A CLASS

33. “PYRAMUS AND THISBE”: TRAGEDY OR COMEDY?
Read the play of “Pyramus and Thisbe,” as it is performed before the court in Act 5, scene 1. You may have already read Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, or seen it performed, which was written right around the same time as A Midsummer Night’s Dream—so the subject of star-crossed lovers, handled tragically and comically, was very much on Shakespeare’s mind. Indeed, the plot of Dream and “Pyramus and Thisbe” are almost identical. But “Pyramus and Thisbe” moves us to laughter. How does it accomplish this in its language specifically? Cite evidence from the text.

With a few student volunteers, try acting the scene in two different ways, with the rest of the class acting as directors for the scene. First, try to make the play as hilarious as possible. Next, play it as seriously as you can, trying to make your audience feel sympathy for Pyramus and Thisbe. Discuss the different interpretations and Shakespeare’s possible intent.

Guiding Questions:
• What are the elements of a tragedy? Of a comedy?
• What is it about “Pyramus and Thisbe” that makes it seem ridiculous instead of tragic and horrifying?
• How did your two scenes differ? What parts, if any, remained the same?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R9

34. IRREGULAR METER AND RHYTHM
(To the teacher: For this exercise, push the desks to the sides of the room to create an open space in the middle of the floor.) Open your script to Act 5, scene 1, starting at the line, “If we shadows have offended…” Form a circle and turn toward the right. While reading Puck’s final speech, take one step per beat, stomping on the stressed syllables.

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.

What do you notice about this rhythm? How is it different from the iambic pentameter you have already studied? Why might Shakespeare have written Puck’s final monologue in this unusual meter? After you have completed this exercise, watch this rock musical version of Puck’s final monologue at http://tinyurl.com/pucksfinalmonologue. Follow along with the text. Does this actor stress the beats as we have scanned the speech, or does he choose to deviate from the meter?
Guiding Questions:
• How is the rhythm of Puck’s speech different than regular iambic pentameter?
• What effect does the irregular meter create?
• Why might Shakespeare have chosen short lines and irregular meter for the final monologue of the play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R5

IN SMALL GROUPS

35. PUNCTUATION EXPLORATION

Take a look at Quince’s Prologue to “Pyramus and Thisbe,” printed below without punctuation or proper capitalization. As a class, read the passage once through for sense. As you listen, individually mark places you think punctuation should go. Remember to think about exclamation marks, question marks, commas or dashes at places where you think a brief pause is needed, and periods where you think a single thought ends. Then, in groups of three or four, agree on punctuation. Read the monologue again, emphasizing your punctuation choices. Discuss what is clearer now that you have added your own punctuation marks.

QUINCE

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 content 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

Now, read the same passage through again with the punctuation as noted in the First Folio, the first publication of Shakespeare’s (almost…) complete works. What differences do you find? What effect does the punctuation in the First Folio create?

QUINCE

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 content 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

Guiding Questions:
• How do your punctuation choices change the meaning of the passage?
• What may have been Shakespeare’s purpose in using such unexpected punctuation?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L2, R5
36. **IMAGERY, TABLEAU AND MULTIMEDIA**

A tableau is a wordless, still (or almost still) picture made by bodies in a group and in relationship to one another, assuming certain poses and conveying a particular mood or image. An enacted play often ends with a tableau that the director creates to leave a dramatic impression on the minds of the audience. Use the tableau as a starting off point to tap into a multimedia project that explores the imagery of Puck’s final speech.

**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.

- In groups of two or three, agree on one line to explore. Create a tableau—a “living sculpture”—based on that line alone. Find physical stances that express the imagery and mood of your line.
- Without revealing which line your group selected, present your tableau for another group, and then observe theirs. When you are observing another group’s tableau, write as many descriptive words based on what you see.
- Find digital images that illustrate the descriptive words you have written. Check out Creative Commons (http://search.creativecommons.org) a website where you can search media including photography, music and videos that you can legally publish with free copyright licenses.
- Create a collage with your favorite images. There are many free, collage software programs on-line. Try Fotor (http://www.fotor.com/features/collage.html) to start.
- Publish all the collages on the Bard Blog, or post hard copies on the board. Seeing them all in one place, work with your group to find an instrumental song that mirrors the mood of the collages. Explore music at Sound Junction (http://www.soundjunction.org/default.asp) where you can find music from across the world. You can even create your own music there. You can also search music on Creative Commons.
- In your group, play the song while reading Puck’s final monologue aloud. What is the result? Do the instruments and melodies suit the words? Does the music evoke the mood and the imagery?

**Guiding Questions:**
- What words, sounds or imagery influenced the creation of your tableau?
- What is the mood do you think the text suggests at the end of the play?

*Consider Common Core Anchor Standards L5, R4, SL1, SL2*
37. MIDSUMMER IN MUSIC

If you were to tell the entire story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with music, how would it sound? Would you have a specific sound for the mortal world and a different sound for the fairy world? Felix Mendelssohn’s score for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is probably the best-known piece of music for a Shakespeare play. Listen to the Overture several times at http://tinyurl.com/mendelssohndreamoverture, exploring a different purpose with each listening.

The first time, close your eyes and allow mental images come to your mind from the play; write down these images as they come to you. Listen to the song a second time and write down the names of particular characters that each section reminds you of. The third time, make notes for yourself about which scenes or events in the play the music evokes for you. Now, compare your list of characters and scenes. Do they match? Discuss your responses as a class and then compare them to the Kennedy’s Center’s description of this work at http://tinyurl.com/abouttheoverture.

Guiding Questions:
- How can music tell the story to an audience?
- Did you get a strong sense of “mortal” music and “fairy” music?
- What forms of storytelling use music to help convey plot, character and mood?
- How does Mendelssohn’s music compare to how you imagined *Midsummer* should sound?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R7

After You Read the Play

38. BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION

After you’ve finished reading the play, continue adding to your Bard Blog. Use this idea to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

- Looking back and reflecting on the play, choose one question that’s still puzzling you about *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. It could be a question about character, plot, theme, relationship, or anything else that’s still on your mind. Do any resolutions in the final act leave you asking questions? What ambiguity does the play leave for us to question? Consider, for instance, that Demetrius is the only character whose love potion is not removed from his eyes. Shakespeare seems to suggest that he remains under its influence at the end of the play. If he weren’t, would he still want to marry Helena? Does it bother you that he is still under the spell? Why or why not? Feel free to revisit your blog post after seeing the performance, and add any new insights you might have.

- *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* talks a lot about love—Helena laments the folly of love early on in the play (1.1) and love motivates a good deal of the action. What is the nature of love in this play? Browse the play, and make a list of key words and descriptors related to love. What are the characteristics of love in your own opinion? Based on your web, what do you think Shakespeare may have wanted audiences to think? Consider also searching the play for textual connections to madness, reason and judgment, or magic. How does Shakespeare define these concepts in the play? How does he present them?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, W6, W10
AS A CLASS

39. CHARACTER QUARANTINE

(To the teacher: Divide your class into five small groups, providing each group with five slips of paper or blank index cards—you can increase or decrease the number of groups depending on the size of your class. Assign each group a major character from A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Designate a corner of the room for each of the five characters.)

In your small groups, identify five lines spoken by your assigned character that demonstrate his/her journey within the play. Chart those moments to make sure those lines best correspond to the character’s development. Write each line on a strip of paper or index card, notating the character’s name. Delegate tasks among the group: dueling Quote Seekers, Arc Charter, Scribe, and Time-keeper. When finished, turn your cards in, face-down, with one pile for each of the five groups.

Pull a card from another pile at random. Read the quote quietly to yourself and move to the corner/location of the room designated to the character who speaks your line, joining others who have lines from the same character. In this new group, read your lines aloud to one another. Do this a few times, rearranging yourselves until you are confident you are speaking the lines in the sequence they appear in the play, beginning to end.

Create five “living statues”—frozen stances with your body—that represent your character in the moment he/she speaks each line. Present your character’s story arc with the rest of the class confirming the order or suggesting changes.

Want an extra challenge? Omit the character name from the quotes and see if you and your classmates can determine who the speaker is before moving to the appropriate corner of the classroom.

Guiding Questions:
• How does each line connect to a defining moment for your character?
• How do the “living statues” help us to understand the character’s arcs?
• Which characters arguably undergo the biggest transformation from the beginning to the end of the story?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL1, SL4

40. CHARACTER MOTIVATION

Which characters in A Midsummer Night’s Dream play the largest role in meddling with other people’s affairs throughout the course of the play? Make a list of these characters on the board—then on your own, rank these characters from most meddling to least meddling, using quotes from the play to support your choices.

Choose one of the characters from your list. In that characters’ persona, write a justification of your character’s actions as convincingly as you can, again using evidence from the text. As a class, read some of the justifications aloud and allow the rest of the class to ask questions and challenge the character’s rationale for their actions.

Guiding Question:
• How did hearing the justification for a character’s actions affect your opinion of—or ability to empathize with—a character?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL4, W9

IN SMALL GROUPS

41. EXPLORING POINTS OF VIEW

Divide the class into small groups, and recount the story of A Midsummer Night’s Dream through RAFT-ing. In your group, decide on the following:
42. CHARACTER STUDY: THESEUS AND OBERON
Since Peter Brook’s groundbreaking production of this play nearly fifty years ago, the characters of Theseus and Oberon are often double cast, which means that one actor plays both parts. In small groups, explore the similarities between the two rulers. What are the differences? What skills or talents does each use to rule his kingdom? Make a chart or diagram to show your findings. If you were directing this play and chose to double-cast these roles, how might you show their similarities and their differences? After you see the performance, discuss director David H. Bell’s interpretation of these two characters.

Guiding Questions:
• Based on your textual discoveries, what qualities or traits would an actor taking on both of these roles need to be able to portray?
• How might double-casting alter the audience’s interpretation of the play?
• Do you agree with the director’s casting choice for Theseus and Oberon at CST?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, SL1, SL4, and SL5

43. THE STORY IN TWENTY LINES
In small groups, look through the script to choose the most important lines (up to twenty!), making sure to illustrate all aspects of the plot. What scenes must be represented by a line to move the story along? What actions will you use to help your audience understand what’s going on? Prepare a script connecting your selected lines with brief, over-the-top narration in the style of a movie trailer. Act out your trailer for your classmates, or consider filming a montage of clips or still photos to play under the recorded sound of the trailer. (To the teacher: For a visual example of this activity, check out this movie trailer, http://www.tinyurl.com/taftmovietrailer, for another Shakespeare play performed by students at Taft High School in Chicago!)

Guiding Questions:
• What are some strategies you can use to select lines?
• What becomes clearer in the plot when selecting only twenty lines to tell the entire story? What would you argue are the most important elements of the story?
• How can you use this concept for future use in reading?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, SL1, SL2
ON YOUR OWN

44. CREATING A BACK STORY “BACKPACK”

An actor must be as detailed as possible about the life of the character he or she will be playing. What does the character’s voice sound like, how does he move? What’s the character afraid of, what does he want more than anything else in the world? Actors must make choices about a character’s “back story” based on what is said about them as well as by them in the text of the play.

Choose a character from A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and answer the questions above to begin getting inside your chosen character’s head. Collect materials that you think your character would carry around in his/her backpack—and explain why you chose each item. Your classmates will be asking you questions, like: “Was that item a gift?” “Who gave it to you?” etc. An actor must be as specific as possible in creating his/her character!

Guiding Questions:
• What are the most meaningful items in your own backpack? What items do you imagine your character would find valuable and want to keep with them at all times?
• How does imagining the life of your character outside of the play help you to understand the character’s actions in the play?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R3, SL4

45. THE STORY: “TRANSLATING” INTO YOUR OWN WORDS

Shakespeare wrote not just for the wealthy and well-educated, but also for the lower classes, and for men and women alike! Choose a character from the play and find one of that character’s longer speeches (at least ten lines). Re-write the speech in your own words with a particular audience in mind. How would you change the wording of the speech if you were writing for a young child? How about a teenager? An adult who has never studied Shakespeare? What parts of Shakespeare’s text would you keep the same? What words would you change? Be as creative as you like with your revisions, but remember to preserve the tone of the original speech in your “translation.”

Guiding Questions:
• What words or expressions are the most challenging to put into your own words?
• What do you better understand about the speech now that it is in your own words?
• How did your consideration of your audience affect your language and tone?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS L3, R4, W3

The Performance: Preparing and Reflecting

This section will help you begin to imagine what it might be like to see the play, especially if you’ve never seen a play at Chicago Shakespeare Theater before, and to reflect on your experience after seeing the performance. Many activities will also ask you to watch the performance with a particular element of the production in mind—the director’s vision, the overall concept, the unique design elements, casting choices, acting style—with guidance on how to reflect meaningfully back in the classroom post-performance.

46. BARD BLOG: A TOOL FOR DISCUSSION

Before and after you see the performance, continue adding to your Bard Blog. Use these ideas to get you started, or modify other activities in this section to a blogging format:

• Select one of the quotations from the “What the Critics Say” section of this handbook. Do you agree with the writer?
Blog an argument about this quotation. Cite specific examples from the play to support your assertions. Does your argument still hold up after seeing the performance?

• Each actor brings his or her own unique quality to a character. They make specific choices based on the director’s vision, chemistry with the ensemble of other actors and their own interpretation of what motivates their character to action. Choose a character to follow closely when you see CST’s performance (if you already began a character diary, stick with your same character.) As you watch the actor playing your chosen character, note the acting choices he or she makes through voice, movement and “subtext”—the inner feelings beneath the spoken words. Compose a free-write of your thoughts on the actor’s interpretation of the character. How does the actor in CST’s production differ from what you had imagined? What choices did the actor make that enhanced your understanding of the character?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R6, W6, W10

AS A CLASS

47. THE STORY IN SHORT

If you have not read A Midsummer Night’s Dream in class, use these resources to become acquainted with the story and follow the performance more easily:

• Refer to the dramatis personae and the synopsis in the beginning of the handbook.
• Watch Video SparkNotes: Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream at http://www.sparknotes.com/sparknotes/video/msnd
• Use the “Before You Read the Play” activities in this handbook to become more familiar with the story, setting, characters, themes and language.

L.I.N.K to activate any prior knowledge you may have about A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

• List the information you already know about the story of the play before you watch the Sparknotes video or review the handbook sections.
• Inquire about other information you would like to know.
• After you watch the video and review the handbook sections above, Note new knowledge and connections between known information.
• Finish by writing what you Know about the story including setting, characters, and themes.

Discuss what else you would like to learn about the play before going to see the performance at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. In groups, list all questions you still have about the story on large chart paper and hang them around the classroom. As you explore the play further, fill in the answers to the questions. Listen and watch closely during the performance to be able to respond to any of the unanswered questions when you return to the classroom.

Guiding Questions:
• What images come to mind when you hear A Midsummer Night’s Dream?
• What do you already know about Shakespeare’s plays or plays in general?
• What questions do you still have about the story as you anticipate attending CST’s production?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R7
48. **THE AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE**

The audience in Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s courtyard-style theater is always in view of each other. The experience of theater is one of community. We are all present together, watching a story that has been acted countless times for hundreds of years and in hundreds of cities around the world. The thrust stage is much like the stages of Elizabethan theaters and situates the action of the play in the midst of the audience, allowing audience members to watch both the actors and each other! After you see you *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, share when you became aware of other audience members. How did this affect your own experience? Were there times during the performance that you found yourself watching other audience members rather than watching the stage action?

**Guiding Questions:**
- How does the audience experience at a play compare to a sporting event? A movie?
- How did the actors interact with the audience?
- What other art forms can you see live as an audience member? How are they similar to theater?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL1**

**IN SMALL GROUPS**

49. **CASTING A PRODUCTION**

Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s casting director is responsible for finding the right person for every character you see on our stage—no small task! After you’ve read the play, think about each character—how do they look, sound, move and behave? Think of television and film celebrities who fit your image of the character and, in groups, discuss who your “Dream Team” would be for your version of the play. Print or post on your class blog images to create “headshots” for your perfect cast! Then present your cast to your classmates, explaining why you made each decision, and compare your ideas with those of your classmates—and using specific textual evidence whenever possible. After you see the play, contrast your vision to that of Director David H. Bell and the actors whom he and CST’s casting director have assembled.

**Guiding Questions:**
- What clues in the text should you consider when casting a character?
- Why might one director choose different actors from another?
- How is your “dream team” different than or similar to Chicago Shakespeare’s cast of actors? How did the production’s interpretation of the main characters compare to yours?

**CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R1, R7, SL5**

50. **DIRECTOR’S VISION**

Even though we study Shakespeare’s works as literature today, they were originally written to be performed rather than read—and in fact only half of Shakespeare’s plays were even printed before he died. Every director has a vision to suit his/her own interpretation of the play and the audience’s tastes. Read “What Creators These Mortals Be,” an article published in The New York Times ([http://theater.nytimes.com/2013/06/16/theater/a-midsummer-nights-dream-in-different-looks-and-cities.html](http://theater.nytimes.com/2013/06/16/theater/a-midsummer-nights-dream-in-different-looks-and-cities.html)) to get a sense of the range of creativity and innovation different directors have envisioned for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in productions across the country just this past summer.

Before you come to see CST’s director David H. Bell production, think about how you would bring *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to life in performance. How will you combine the following design elements together to carry out your vision of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on your stage? Design and produce a poster or diorama of your production that addresses the following areas to demonstrate your overall vision:
Setting:
What will the setting of your play be like? What do you want your audience to see when they first enter the theater? Look through different magazines and use your own imagination to create a visual representation of your set. What colors will you use? What kind of furniture, if any? What will Theseus’s court look like? The woods? Can you think of specific buildings or rooms that have definite moods?

Sound and Music:
The script to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* calls for music or dancing many times throughout the play. Look at each instance where music is called for. What kind of music would you want to use in each instance? Write down a few adjectives describing the mood you want to create. What sounds or music would you use to evoke this mood? Can you think of specific songs you would want to have played or sung? Certain instruments? Make sure you can explain why you’ve made a certain choice. What other times would you like for music to be heard? For example, many directors have music that follows the fairies wherever they go. What kind of music would you use for these instances? Add a playlist of the music you would include on your poster. To jumpstart your research, visit [http://www.soundjunction.org/](http://www.soundjunction.org/), a web resource where you can explore music by historical period, location in the world, genre, and even listen to the sounds of individual instruments.

Costumes:
Directors have grappled with the question of how to costume the fairies since *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was written. How will your fairies look? How will they move? What clothing and make-up will they wear? How will you make them look like spirits of the night? You may want to “Google Images” past performances of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, as well as at the “Performance History” essay in this handbook for costume ideas. Create a visual representation of the costume idea for a fairy, a mechanical and one of the mortals to add to your poster presentation. You may choose to draw the costumes or print images. (Professional costume designers present their early ideas to the director on a similar kind of “costume board,” containing cut-outs from books and magazines, fabric swatches, and sometimes images from art or history.)

Lighting:
Lighting is an important element of live theater that works hand in hand with scenic design. It evokes mood through color, brightness, texture and shadows. Lighting often sets the time of day. It can also enhance location through special pattern and design effects like stars, water, the shadows of leaves and clouds. Spotlights and “specials” can isolate actors on stage to stand out to an audience. Think about a specific moment in the play and how you would want lighting to enhance it. Consider Act 2, scene 2 when Titania is lulled to sleep by her fairy attendants; Act 3, scene 1 when the mechanicals rehearse in the woods; Act 4, scene 1 when Theseus, Egeus and Hippolyta find the young couples asleep outside; or Act 5, scene 1 the concluding moments during Puck’s final speech. Depict the lighting for a moment in the play on your poster. Pay close attention to location, time of day and mood of the scene.

As you watch CST’s production, note the choices that the lighting, costume, sound and set designers made in collaboration with Director David H. Bell. At what moments did you become aware of music or special lighting effects? How did the costumes affect your understanding of the characters? How did all of the design choices affect the mood of this production? How did they impact your emotional response to the story?

Guiding Questions:
- Who is the target audience for your production?
- What kind of theater space do you imagine your production to be performed? In the round? Black box? Outdoors? Large proscenium?
- What can you use to evoke a mood in your design?
- How can you convey the most important themes of the story through design?
- What was the most vivid scene in your mind as you read the play? How can the design elements bring this scene to life on stage?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS SL5, R1, R7, W9
31.

REIMAGINING A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM

Though Shakespeare set *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in and around Athens, many directors have interpreted Athens and the play’s other settings to be a place quite different from ancient Greece, or even Elizabethan England. Watch, for example, how Classical Theatre of Harlem has made “Athens” a reflection of Harlem in New York City - http://tinyurl.com/midsummerinharlem. If Athens becomes Harlem, what is the fairyland like within that world? Who are the Rude Mechanicals?

Before you see CST’s interpretation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, create a modern concept for one of the play’s settings. What do you imagine Theseus’s court might look like in today’s world? Or the forest? Or the place where the Rude Mechanicals meet to rehearse? Once you have determined an idea for setting, discuss in small groups how a modern concept would impact an actor’s interpretation of their character. After you see CST’s interpretation, discuss as a class how the director and designers conceptualized the Rude Mechanicals.

Guiding Questions:

- If you were to conceptualize the world of the play to reflect your community, how might Athens, the fairies and the mechanicals change from a more traditional interpretation?
- Why might artists choose to redefine the world of the play?
- What was your reaction to CST’s interpretation? Did the concept stay true to the story?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R2, R9, SL2

ON YOUR OWN

52.

A LETTER TO THE EDUCATION TEAM AT CST

Write a letter to Chicago Shakespeare Theater expressing your opinions about the play. What was your favorite part? What part, if any, didn’t you like? Share your experience.

Guiding Questions:

- Did seeing the play performed affect your understanding of any of the characters or scenes?
- How did you feel about the choices the director and designers made about the time period, which influenced the costumes, set, and music in the play?
- Were there any interpretations of characters or scenes with which you especially agreed or disagreed? Why?
- What surprised you about the performance?
- How does seeing the play performed live compare to reading a play in class?

CONSIDER COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS R7, W2, W4

53.

DRAMA CRITIC

You are a drama critic for your school newspaper. Write a review of the performance for your paper. Briefly recount the plot. Discuss the parts of the production—including the casting, acting, setting, music, costumes, cuts—you thought worked particularly well, or did not work well at all and explain why you thought so. Consider “publishing” your piece in a classroom newspaper or the Bard Blog.

Extension Activity: Before you write your review, read three different theater reviews of current plays at Theatre is Chicago’s Critics Review Round-Up: http://www.theatreinchicago.com/reviewlistings.php. Analyze the structure of a review, identifying the key elements. Based on these key elements, describe the style you found most helpful (or least helpful) in communicating a play’s appeal for potential theater-goers. Now, you are ready to write your review of CST’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.
Guiding Questions:
- How easy (or difficult) was it to understand Shakespeare’s language?
- How much did you believe what was happening?
- Did the comedic moments make you laugh out loud? Were there any moments that moved you?
- Did the performance convey a sense of magic effectively?
- Which performances were most surprising? (For instance, were there characters who were funnier on stage than on the page?)

Consider Common Core Anchor Standards R7, W1, W9

Timothy Edward Kane at Oberon, Matthew Abraham as Changeling Boy and Tracy Michelle Arnold as Titania in CST’s 2012 Production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Directed by Gary Griffin
Strategies for Using Film to Teach Shakespeare

MARY T. CHRISTEL taught AP Literature and Composition as well as media and film studies courses at Adlai E. Stevenson High School from 1979 to 2012. She has published several works on media literacy including Seeing and Believing: How to Teach Media Literacy in the English Classroom with Ellen Krueger (Heinemann) as well as contributing articles to Teaching Shakespeare Today (NCTE), Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-First Century (U of Ohio), For All Time: Critical Issues in Shakespeare Studies (Wakefield Press). Ms. Christel has been recognized by the Midwest Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for promoting media literacy education.

Given that Shakespeare, as a playwright in Elizabethan England, found himself at the epicenter of popular culture, one can't help but wonder if he wouldn't be writing screenplays if he were alive today. He would likely be pleased that his legacy is not only perpetuated on stages like CST but also on the silver—and now digital—screens. It is up to the savvy teacher to determine how to help students “read” Shakespeare in the three ways Mary Ellen Dakin suggests: as text, as performance and as film.

Mary Ellen Dakin’s recently published a book entitled Reading Shakespeare Film First (NCTE 2012), which might seem a bit contradictory to the approach many English/Language Arts teachers take. How can one “read Shakespeare” if one places “film first”? Film might be considered an enemy when helping students to read and appreciate Shakespeare’s work. For most teachers, film generally follows the reading of a play and functions as the “dessert” at the unit’s end. The strategies that follow are intended to help teachers reconsider how and when film can be used in order to motivate, clarify and enrich students’ engagement with any play.

FILMS CAN BE USED BEFORE READING...

...to preview the story, characters and themes

Many of the stories that Shakespeare dramatized were familiar, even well known, to his audience, so providing students with a broad outline of the action of a play prior to reading it would be consistent with the knowledge that Renaissance audiences brought to many of the plays they saw performed on stage. Previewing can be accomplished in the classroom in one of two ways.

First, twelve of the plays were adapted into thirty-minute animated films, which aired in the 1990s on HBO and now are distributed on DVD by Ambrose Video. These “Shakespeare in short” adaptations retain the play’s original language and present the essentials of the story in an abbreviated form. This activity acquaints students with the major characters, incidents and themes, providing a “road map” for students who might get mired in sorting out who’s who and what’s what as they adjust themselves to the language and structure of play.

A second method requires the teacher to select key scenes from a film that takes a relatively conventional approach to the play. For example, Franco Zeffirelli’s version of Romeo and Juliet (1968) would be preferred over Baz Luhrmann’s film (1996), while Kenneth Branagh’s Hamlet (1996) is a rare “full text” version and useful in this context whereas Zeffirelli’s adaptation (1990) reduces the text to two hours on screen. The BBC filmed all of Shakespeare’s plays for television in the 1970s and ‘80s; these versions are faithful to the texts, with relatively traditional staging and the full text intact. Like the animated films, the teacher’s scene selection should provide students with a broad outline of the play, as well as introduction to key events, main characters and crucial soliloquies. Students can, and do, use these scenes as reference points in their discussion of the play as they read it.

...to create context

Film can be utilized as an introductory element of a unit to provide a context prior to reading a specific play. A&E’s Biography series provides students with Shakespeare’s biographical details and a survey of the times in Shakespeare: A Life of Drama (1996), a conventional approach to delivering contextual information. (Materials to frame the use of this fifty-minute program can be located at http://www.aetv.com/class/admin/study_guide/archives/aetv_guide.0550.html.) Historian Michael Wood takes viewers on a lively tour of various locations throughout contemporary England to explore Shakespeare’s life, times, and plays in this acclaimed four-part series, In Search of Shakespeare (2004). (An episode guide is available at http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/theshow/ to facilitate selection of the most appropriate segments from this comprehensive work.)
Context can be built by viewing a commercially released film that “sets the stage” for the Elizabethan era, enabling students to get a sense of the politics, social customs, and “look” of the times. A film like Elizabeth (1998) starring Cate Blanchett has little to do with Shakespeare, but it provides a vivid glimpse into the monarch’s struggle to claim and maintain the throne. Shakespeare in Love (1998) and Anonymous (2011) provide glimpses into the world of early modern theater practice and Shakespeare himself, but the liberties these films take with conventional historical fact can create more confusion than clarity for many students. Excerpts, however, could be used to help students visualize the time and the occasion of attending the theater, but contextual information is required to help students sort out historical accuracy from bias, poetic license or pure invention.

Al Pacino’s documentary Looking for Richard (1996) provides an ideal way to contextualize the study of Richard III, but it should not be overlooked as a viewing experience to help students of any play understand what makes the study and performance of Shakespeare invigorating for actors, directors, scholars, readers and audiences. Pacino’s passion for the hunchback king is infectious and the film is effectively broken up into sections, focusing on a visit to Shakespeare’s birthplace, Shakespeare’s Globe as it rebuilt in contemporary London, brief conversations with modern Shakespearean scholars and directors, as well as observing actors in rehearsal tackling the meaning of particularly dense passages of text. The film may not be practical in most cases to screen in full, but it certainly helps to build anticipation and knowledge prior to diving into a full text.

Films that document students interacting with Shakespearean texts can also generate enthusiasm for reading, and perhaps performing, a selected play. Shakespeare High (2012) showcases California high school students who annually compete in a Shakespeare scene contest. Students, who are both likely and unlikely competitors, are followed from scene selection, casting, rehearsal, through the final competition. The Hobart Shakespeareans (2005) features fifth-graders, whose home language is not English, performing scenes with uncommon poise and command of the language as a result of a dedicated teacher’s commitment to offering his students the rigor of studying Shakespeare. These films shared, in full or in part, can provide motivation to not only read and understand the text but to take it to the next level of student engagement: performance.

Films Media Group, formerly Films for the Humanities and Sciences, has an extensive catalogue of films useful in providing context; many titles are available as streaming video, allowing teachers to “sample” a film without that “lifelong commitment” to purchasing a DVD that can cost several hundred dollars and sometimes not be the proper fit for students’ interest or abilities.

Many of their offerings have been produced in the UK or by the BBC and cover the gamut of plays and approaches to Shakespeare in performance and on the page. (That search can start at http://ffh.films.com/.)

**FILMS CAN BE USED DURING READING...**

...to clarify understanding

For students who are having difficulty visualizing the action or fully comprehending the language, it is beneficial to watch a faithful adaptation incrementally, act by act. Again, Zeffirelli’s version of Romeo and Juliet works well. The film is easily broken down act by act with all the critical incidents and speeches intact. Students should be given a focus for their viewing, through the lens of their own questions and quandaries that they retain after reading an act, along with thoughts on how the film might address them. As students become more comfortable with the reading/viewing rhythm as they work through the play, they can adopt a more “critical” attitude toward examining later acts to discuss choices made by the screenwriter/adaptor, director, designers and actors.

When working with students who are really struggling with the language and where listening to a recorded version of a play isn’t particularly helpful or engaging, a film can also be used in a “read along” fashion for the exposition and key scenes or speeches. Students follow in their own printed text while the film is running, and are coached to follow in their book while taking “peeks” at the screen when they need the support of the image to clarify their understanding of the language. “Staged” versions of a play with close adherence to the script (BBC, for example) are better choices for this application. More “cinematic” versions tend to be so visually rich that students have a hard time reading rather than
watching. For example, the RSC filmed version of *Macbeth* (1979) featuring Ian McKellan and Judi Dench in the leading roles follows the standard text fairly closely in most of the interactions between *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth*. This strategy is best used for the analysis of short scenes or at moments of crisis in students’ understanding. It is essential for teachers to prescreen scenes to make sure that they closely follow the edition of the play being studied as much as possible.

...to make comparisons

Just as the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries adapted Shakespeare’s scripts to fit the fashion and tastes of the theater-going audiences (as susceptible to trends as the fashion industry), once Shakespeare’s work entered the multi-media performance space of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the text is often transformed to support the spectacle of the cinematic image. Every cinematic adapter of a complex dramatic text must consider the balance of “showing” versus “telling,” sometimes choosing to emphasize the visual over the verbal. These adapters struggle with the question: What can the art of cinema reveal visually through a close-up, crosscut, or a montage that effectively augments or replaces the text? In the past thirty years, Shakespeare’s comedies, tragedies, histories, and romances have been transported to modern settings that maintain the broad outlines of plot and character but replace Shakespeare’s blank verse with contemporary language and colloquialisms. A sample list of adaptations includes:

- *Romeo and Juliet*
- *Ten Things I Hate About You* (1999)...
- *The Taming of the Shrew*
- *O* (2001)...
- *Othello*
- *She’s the Man* (1996)...
- *Twelfth Night*
- *My Own Private Idaho* (1991)...
- *Henry IV*
- *Tempest* (1982)...
- *The Tempest*
- *A Thousand Acres* (1997)...
- *Scotland, PA* (2001)...
- *Macbeth*
- *Men of Respect* (1990)...

Additional adaptations of plot, characters and setting include four plays in the BBC series, entitled *Shakespeare Re-Told* (2005): *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Macbeth*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. A second type of adaptation shifts the plot and characters to another genre, such as the musical (*West Side Story*/*Romeo and Juliet* or *Kiss Me Kate*/*The Taming of the Shrew*), science fiction (*Forbidden Planet*/*The Tempest*) or the Western (*Broken Lance*/*King Lear*). Akira Kurosawa produced the best-known adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays placing them in a different cultural context with his films *Throne of Blood* (1957) based on *Macbeth* and *Ran* (1985) based on *King Lear*. Soviet filmmaker Grigori Kozintsev adapted both *Hamlet* (1964) and *King Lear* (1991), which have been restored and released recently on DVD. For film historians and real curiosity seekers, a collection of adaptations, which run from a few minutes to over an hour, showcase the earliest eras of cinema, entitled *Silent Shakespeare*. Sharing these adaptations, in part or in full, can facilitate the discussion of the relevance of Shakespeare’s themes, conflicts and characters across time, cultures, and cinematic traditions.

**FILMS CAN BE USED AFTER READING...**

...for culminating projects and summative assessment

Students can successfully engage in their own film production as a collaborative project. A movie trailer can tout an imagined film adaptation of the play they have just studied. The necessary steps involved can be found in *Lesson Plans for Creating Media-Rich Classrooms* (NCTE 2007), which includes Scott Williams’s lesson, “Turning Text into Movie Trailers: The *Romeo and Juliet* iMovie Experience.” Creating a trailer requires that students: first focus on the essential elements of plot, character and theme in order to convey excitement; and second, develop an imagined version in a highly condensed and persuasive form, which comes to life in a minute or two.
TERMS TO EXAMINE THE PAGE-TO-SCREEN PROCESS

(adapted from Film Adaptation, ed. James Naremore)

Fidelity:

Much discussion in film adaptation criticism focuses on how faithful a film is to the source material. Obviously, film and literature use very different narrative strategies and tools of composition. A fruitful way to have students approach the question of fidelity is to ask them to list the scenes, characters, motifs, and symbols that are essential to telling the story of the source text. Then as they watch a film adaptation, they can keep track of how those elements are handled by the film version.

Film as Digest:

This concept acknowledges that the written text is far more detailed and comprehensive in its ability to set a scene, develop a character, reveal a narrative point of view, or create a symbol. Film works best in developing plot and showing action.

Condensation:

Due to the “film as digest” phenomenon, characters and events need to be collapsed or composited in order to fit the limitations and conventions of the film adaptation. Students can explore this term by determining which characters can be combined based on their common functions in the text.

Immediacy:

Viewing a film is a far more “immediate” experience cognitively than reading a book. We decode visual images much faster and more readily than the printed word.

Point of View:

What many viewers of film fail to comprehend is that the camera can express a point of view, just as the narrator of a written text can and does. Voice-over narrators are seldom used in film, since it seems artificial and intrusive. Point of view in film is visual and subtle.

Here are three ways to express or describe the point of view in a film:

• Neutral: the camera is merely recording events as they happen in a reportorial fashion.
• This is the most common shot in filmmaking.
• Subjective: the camera assumes the point of view of one of the character so the viewer sees what the character sees.
• Authorial: the director very deliberately focuses the camera on a feature of a sequence or shot to comment on the action or reveal something.

Shot and Sequence:

As defined by Basic Film Terms: A Visual Dictionary, a “shot” is the “basic unit of film structure or an unbroken strip of film made by an uninterrupted running of the camera.” Think of a shot as a “still” image that is combined with other still images to create a moving picture. A shot captures its subject from a particular distance and angle. The camera can be stationary or moving as it captures its subject. Individual shots then are joined together by the editing process to create a sequence of action.
KEY QUESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

Prior to viewing:

• In order to maintain fidelity to Shakespeare’s play, what are the essential scenes that must be included in an adaptation to cover the basic plot? Considering that film is a digest of the original play, what constitutes the exposition, inciting incident, central conflict, complications, climax, and resolution to represent and streamline the central action?
• What point of view dominates the play? Who is the central character? Which character has the most soliloquies or asides and might have the strongest relationship with the reader/viewer as a result? How could the viewpoint of the central character or the character that has the most direct connection with the audience be represented through the use of the camera? Or, should the camera maintain a neutral position to reveal the story and the characters?
• What details does the play provide to guide the casting of principle actors for the central characters? Looking at the text carefully, which details regarding physical appearance, class or behavior should be embodied by an actor to make an immediate impression on the viewer?
• Which supporting characters are essential to the development of the plot and main characters? Which characters serve the same functions in the story? How might several of those characters be composited in order to condense the story in helpful and necessary ways considering a film will normally be shorter than a stage production?
• Which central images, motifs, symbols, or metaphors are central to the literary source? How could one or two of these literary techniques be translated into visual or sound techniques to make their impact more immediate in order to support or to replace the play’s language? How would they be represented on the screen or through the musical score?

During viewing:

• How much of the actual dialogue from the play itself is used in a scene?
• To what extent does the camera work seem unobtrusive, natural or obvious, stylized?
• Which character(s) appears mostly in one shots?
• At what point in the scene are two shots used? What is the effect of their use at that point?
• What is the typical distance (close, medium, long) of the camera to the subject of the shots? To what extent does the manipulation of camera distance make the scene an intimate one or not?
• To what extent are most of the shots at eye level, slightly above, or slightly below? How do subtle changes in angle influence how the viewer perceives the character in the shot?
• To what extent does the scene make use of extreme high or low angles? To what effect?
• To what extent does the camera move? When? What is the effect of the movement?
• To what extent does the sequence use music? If it does, when do you become aware of the music and how does it set a mood or punctuate parts of the dialogue?

After viewing:

• Which choices made to condense the events of the play by the screenwriter are the most successful in translating the original text to the screen? Which choices are less successful or satisfying?
• Which narrative elements (events, characters, key speeches) omitted from the screen adaptation of the play shift the focus of the comedy, tragedy or history in comparison to the original text?
• If any characters were composited, what was gained or lost by reducing the number of characters or altering the function of a particular character through compositing?
• Which actors performed their roles in expected and/or unexpected ways? How did the original text dictate how roles such be performed?
• Which visual elements of the film made the strongest impression on you as a viewer?
• How did the visuals help draw your attention to an element of plot, a character or a symbol that you might have missed or failed to understand when reading the play?
• As a reader of the play, how did viewing the film help you to better understand the overall plot, particular character, or specific symbol/theme?
**DREAM FILM FINDER**

**Top Five Films to Invite into Your Classroom**

Refer to the viewing questions available in “Strategies for Using Film to Teach Shakespeare” in order to set a focus for students before, during, and after screening these films.

1. **Hitting the highlights: The pre-viewing, pre-reading experience**
   *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales – A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

   This twenty-five minute condensed animation provides the perfect overview of the characters and plot to prepare students for reading the play or seeing a performance. To give students a viewing focus, each can be assigned a particular character or plot thread (the lovers, the fairies, the rude mechanicals) to track through the film and write a summary about the importance of their assigned element to the work as a whole. Students can be charged with becoming an “expert” on that element of the play. They can use that as a focus while reading the play or seeing the performance, which can help those who may feel overwhelmed by understanding a complicated narrative or Shakespeare’s language in general.

2. **Let’s get animated: Considering the play’s world of imagination**
   *“Bottom’s Dream” (1984) created by John Canemaker (available on Marching to a Different Toon, Milestone Video)*

   Shakespeare’s fantasy of lovers, fairies and rude mechanicals mixing it up in the forest seems a natural subject for an animated film. In “Bottom’s Dream,” acclaimed filmmaker John Canemaker uses the tools of the animator to craft an interpretation of Nick Bottom’s mock-heroic, romantic dream. This short film could serve as a model for students to visualize an onstage (or offstage) incident and render it as an animated sequence through a storyboard, a flipbook or live action video.

   Directions for creating a storyboard and downloadable storyboard templates:
   - [http://www.the-flying-animator.com/storyboard-template.html](http://www.the-flying-animator.com/storyboard-template.html)

   Directions for making a flipbook:
   - [http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Flipbook](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Flipbook)
   - [http://tinyurl.com/flipbookinstructions](http://tinyurl.com/flipbookinstructions)

3. **Getting the feature film treatment: Midsummer as a Hollywood “rom-com”**
   *William Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream (1999 PG-13) directed by Michael Hoffman*

   Building on a fascination with the Italian region of Tuscany popularized by Frances Mayes’ 1996 memoir Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy, this film situates the story in the Edwardian period in a place referred to as “Monte Athena,” awash in Italian flora and fauna, sunshine and moonlight. Students will recognize actors such as Christian (“Holy Bat- man”) Bale, Michelle Pfeiffer, Kevin Kline, Sam Rockwell, Stanley Tucci, among other familiar faces. The film is an appealing treatment of the play, running a lively 116 minutes and featuring some partial nudity that clearly falls within its PG-13 rating’s range (though it still might be a bit too sensual for middle school students). This film is clearly pitched as a Shakespearean “rom-com,” a highly durable film genre.

   An analysis of the film’s adaptation of the play could critique the following conventions of a cinematic romantic comedy:
   - young lovers who must overcome obstacles to be united in marriage; series of reversals, including mistaken identity or problems in timing lovers’ trysts; lovers usually aided by a shrewd, wisecracking ally, typically of inferior class or status.

   (adapted from Introduction to Film Sobchack and Sobchack)

   Additional definitions of romantic comedy can be found at:
   - [Romantic Comedy: A Pathfinder: https://sites.google.com/site/theromcom/what-is-it](https://sites.google.com/site/theromcom/what-is-it)
   - [TV Tropes: http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/RomanticComedy](http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/RomanticComedy)
4. Getting a modern makeover: Shakespeare’s plays form an anthology television series

*Shakespeare Re-Told* BBC series (2007) - *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

This modern adaptation preserves the lovers, the fairy realm, and the rude mechanicals in a fairly recognizable manner. Those elements are introduced through an engagement party thrown by Theo and Polly for their daughter, Hermia and James Demetrius, at a posh resort called *Dream* Park. The Theo/Polly plot device addresses a marriage that has gone stale and the benefits from the advice from Oberon to Theo over a drink at the resort’s bar. The bittersweet elements of this adaptation can advance the discussion of whether *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in any form, is a comedy, even though it ends in marriage and a sense that “all’s well that ends well.” The BBC Home website offers a helpful link to teaching materials at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/midsummernightsdream/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/midsummernightsdream/).

5. Getting the teen comedy treatment: Riding the wave of contemporary updates

*Get Over It* (2001) starring Kirsten Dunst and Ben Foster

The 1990s and early 2000s yielded a steady stream of updated vernacular versions of Shakespeare’s tragedies (*O, Crazy/Beautiful*) and comedies (*She’s the Man, 10 Things I Hate About You*). *Get Over It* got little attention even though it starred rising star Kirsten Dunst and featured then-unknowns Ben Foster, Colin Hanks and Mila Kunis. The film uses a high school production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to lay the foundation for the central modern plotline echoing Shakespeare’s romantic entanglements and sly interventions that set the teenagers’ romantic aspirations astray and eventually aright.

**A Few Other Adaptations to Consider**

The “top five” selection features the Michael Hoffman’s film, widely available on DVD and through online video streaming. The 1981 BBC television production featuring Helen Mirren as Titania is a widely available option. Two other noteworthy adaptations might be more difficult to locate: the first from 1968, directed by the RSC’s Peter Hall and featuring Diana Rigg, Helen Mirren and Judi Dench, which ran in the US on CBS television; and the second, Adrian Noble’s theatrical release film based on his popular 1996 RSC production, which featured a surreal design concept.

**Five Curiosities (for the diehard Shakespearean “cinéaste”)**

1. The 1909 silent film version directed by Charles Kent and J. Stuart Blackton is available on the DVD *Silent Shakespeare* (Milestone Collection 2000) and YouTube by searching “Kent Midsummer.” (The DVD is packed with other silent film treatments of Shakespeare’s work.)

2. A 1935 Hollywood extravaganza starred Mickey Rooney as Puck, James Cagney as Bottom, plus many actors playing the fairies—who would later appear as Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz*.

3. In 1982, Woody Allen put his own spin on Shakespeare’s text with the film *A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy*—a hybrid of Shakespeare’s play and Ingmar Bergman’s film *Smiles of a Summer Night* (which was in turn adapted by Stephen Sondheim as the musical *A Little Night Music*). This adaptation begs the question: How much of the original play’s elements must be present in an adaptation to be considered the template for the updated narrative? Like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Allen places his characters in a pastoral setting that allows them to shed social and romantic inhibitions, leading to the coupling and uncoupling of major and minor characters to comic and poignant effect. One question to ponder: what constitutes the magical or fantastic conduit that helps these characters re-imagine their romantic possibilities? The film’s PG rating makes it classroom-friendly, but it is probably best suited for more mature, sophisticated students. The film trailer can be found on YouTube, and reviews can found be at [http://tinyurl.com/woodyallenmidsummerreview](http://tinyurl.com/woodyallenmidsummerreview) and [http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/a-midsummer-night’s-sex-comedy-1982](http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/a-midsummer-night’s-sex-comedy-1982)

4. In 2010 University of Kansas hosted a production of the play that featured “original pronunciation” of the text. Films Media Group offers a seventy-seven minute film, which explores how this project was conceived, developed, and performed in an intimate acting space. Rental or purchase of the film offers access to a copy of the script and an e-book, *The Original Pronunciation of Shakespeare’s English*. Additional information at: [http://ffh.films.com/id/30535/A_Midsummer_Nights_Dream_in_Original_Pronunciation.htm](http://ffh.films.com/id/30535/A_Midsummer_Nights_Dream_in_Original_Pronunciation.htm)
5. *10ml Love*, also produced in 2010, is a modestly produced Bollywood film, which uses the play's basic premise of romantic misadventures set against a wedding celebration. The title refers to a love potion handed over by a mother to her love-lorn son to help in his efforts to woo the reluctant object of his desires. In a comic manner, the film also explores the tensions between people of Christian and Muslim faiths present in modern-day India. Reviews can be found at [http://www.bollywoodlife.com/news-gossip/10ml-love-movie-review-refreshing-take-on-shakespeare/](http://www.bollywoodlife.com/news-gossip/10ml-love-movie-review-refreshing-take-on-shakespeare/) and [http://indiatoday.in/story/10ml-love-movie-review/1/236599.html](http://indiatoday.in/story/10ml-love-movie-review/1/236599.html).

So what will be your students' film favorite? Whether teaching the entire text or previewing the play prior to attending a CST performance, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provides teachers and students an appealing range of films, which both speak to the enduring appeal of this play in popular culture and how easily the play's setting, characters and intersecting plotlines can adapt to widely divergent time periods, social contexts and cultures without losing its original comic and romantic vitality.

From Left: Juan Gabriel Ruiz as Demetrius, Bob Turton as Lysander, Megan Long as Hermia and Lacy Katherine Campbell as Helena in CST's 2008 production of *Short Shakespeare! A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Directed by Amanda Dehnert.
Theater Warm-ups

Unlike many of the classic works studied in the English classroom, Shakespeare’s plays were written to be spoken out loud and heard by an audience. Introducing drama-based activities into the classroom can be a powerful tool for increasing fluency and comprehension, encouraging empathy, building community, and exploring character perspective and choices. Learning to read Shakespeare can be compared to learning music, sports or other “learning by doing” classes. How does a music class usually begin? With a warm-up. How does one start a physical class? With a warm-up!

A brief physical and vocal warm-up—approximately five to seven minutes—can help students move from a “classroom mode” to a “studio mode.” It sets the tone for a student coming to understand Shakespeare as a living script, as well as a piece of great literature. And you will find that after the first couple of times, your students’ trepidations—and yours—will be unseated by energy and focus. If this is your first time incorporating warm-ups with your students, a few rehearsals in the privacy of your own home can do a lot to bolster your courage! You might also want to check out this video of actors practicing through physical and vocal warm-ups shared by the National Theatre in London at http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/video/vocal-warm-up-1-breathing. Every actor develops his/her own set of physical and vocal warm-ups. Warm-ups help the actor prepare for rehearsal or performance not only physically, but also mentally. For the actor, warm-ups create a mental and physical space to focus on the work at hand, forgetting all the day-to-day distractions of life, and to begin to assume the flexibility required to create a character.

PHYSICAL WARM-UPS

Getting Started

- creates focus on the immediate moment develops body awareness helps reduce tension
- Push desks aside to create an open area where students can spread out and move. Begin by taking a comfortable stance with feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointing straight ahead, knees relaxed, and arms down by your sides. Inhale deeply through your nose, filling your lungs deep into your abdomen, and exhale through your mouth. Repeat this a few times.

Warm-up from the top of the body down (approximately seven to ten minutes)

- increases circulation, flexibility, and body readiness through gentle movement
- increases physical and spatial awareness

a) Begin by doing head-rolls to the left and to the right, about four times each way, very slowly. Then do a series of shoulder rolls to the back and to the front, again very slowly, and emphasizing a full range of motion.

b) Stretch each arm toward the ceiling alternately, and try to pull all the way through the rib cage, repeating this motion six to eight times.

c) Next, with particular care to keep knees slightly bent, twist from the waist in each direction, trying to look behind. Again, repeat six to eight times.

d) From a standing position, starting with the top of the head, roll down with relaxed neck and arms until the body is hanging from the waist. Ask the students to shake things around, making sure their bodies are relaxed. From this position, bend at the knees, putting both hands on the floor. Stretch back up to hanging. Repeat this action about four times. Then roll back up—starting from the base of the spine, stack each vertebra until the head is the last thing to come up.

e) Repeat the deep breathing from the beginning of the warm-up. Ask the students to bring their feet together, bend their knees, and keeping their knees together ask the students to rotate their knees in a circle parallel to the ground six to eight times. Repeat in the other direction. Return to standing.
f) Pick up the right foot, rotate it inward six to eight times, and then do the same with the left foot. Repeat with outward rotation of the foot. Take a few moments and shake out the entire body.

VOCAL WARM-UPS

Vocal warm-ups can follow your physical warm-up. Some of these exercises may seem strange, but can be made silly and fun, while accomplishing the necessary vocal warm-up. Once students see their teacher looking completely foolish going through the vocal warm-ups, they are much more likely to smile and go along with it. So take a risk! Go for it. They will get on board and begin to embrace the silliness when they see you can too.

• helps connect physicality to the voice
• begins to open the imagination to performance possibilities

a) Begin by gently massaging your jaw muscles in a downward motion on either side of your face. This will help wake up the facial muscles.

b) Stick your tongue out as far as possible—repeat this with the tongue pointing up, down, and to each side. Repeat this exercise once or twice.

c) Ask students to put their lips gently together and blow air through them, creating a “raspberry.”

d) Next, hum - quietly, loudly, and across the entire vocal range. The vocal instrument loves to hum. Humming helps to lubricate the vocal chords.

e) Create the vowel sounds, overemphasizing each shape with the face —A, E, I, O, and U—with no break.

f) Choose two or three tongue-twisters—there are some listed below. Again, overemphasize the shape of each sound with the lips, tongue, jaw, and facial muscles. Begin slowly with each tongue-twister, and gradually increase speed, repeating until the speed is moving along so quickly that the enunciation is lost.

Tongue Twisters

Tongue twisters and other drama-based activities provide a great forum for us to help shy adolescents and those who struggle with articulating aloud in the classroom to build self-confidence in public speaking. Foster a safe and encouraging environment to cultivate this life skill that will benefit them beyond their adolescence.

• Red leather, yellow leather
• unique New York
• rubber, baby, buggie, bumpers
• Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers
• the lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue, the tip of the tongue, the teeth, the lips

Actors have described the experience of acting Shakespeare as the “Olympics of Acting.” Shakespeare’s verse demands a very flexible vocal instrument, and an ability to express not only the flow of the text, but also the emotional shifts, which are suggested by the variations in rhythm and sound. In light of the sheer volume of words—some rarely or never used in our contemporary language—the actor must also be prepared to help the audience with his body, as well. An actor preparing to perform Shakespeare must go through each word of his text, determine its meaning, and then express it clearly to his audience. Shakespeare requires a very physically demanding style. The physical and vocal warm-up is the actor’s basis for each performance.
Guiding Questions for Physical and Vocal Warm-ups:
• Why is a warm-up important for actors before a rehearsal or performance?
• Why is breathing included in a theater warm-up?
• As we begin to explore this play in class through performance, what do we need to do vocally to be understood by our audience—and by our classmates?
• What other activities/professions require a warm-up to begin?
• How might those activities be similar to acting?
• How is acting a physical activity? How is it a mental activity?

COMMUNITY-BUILDERS

Each of these exercises is meant to open and expand our imaginations, increase our sense of “ensemble” or teamwork, and encourage being “in the moment.” These are some of the most fundamental and crucial elements of an actor’s training—and, of course, they are fundamental, too, to the learning process in the classroom. Incorporating community-builders into your classroom routine builds the trust and safety needed for risk-taking and creativity. Allow five to ten minutes to include one or two of the exercises suggested below to follow a physical and vocal warm-up.

Mirroring
• helps build trust within the ensemble/classroom
• encourages the students to “listen” with all their senses
• helps the students reach a state of “relaxed readiness,” which will encourage their impulses and discourage their internal censors

With a partner, sit comfortably facing each other in relatively close proximity. In each pair, one person will move while the other moves as their reflection. Begin by using smaller, slower movements, and work up to the maximum range of movement (in size and speed) that your partner can follow. Make eye-contact with your partner to take in the whole person, rather than following each other’s small motions with your eyes. Switch leaders and repeat. After both partners have taken a turn, stand and increase your range of movement. Switch leaders and repeat. Now, keep going, but there is no leader. See what happens, and then discuss. (To the teacher: Consider playing music softly in the background to help your students get lost in the activity and dispel self-consciousness. The music will help inspire movement, too!)

Four Up
• helps the ensemble/classroom work together
• helps to slowly introduce physical activities in the classroom
• brings focus to the classroom

For this exercise, everyone stays seated at desks. The goal is to have four people standing at all times. There are a few rules: anyone can stand up whenever they want, but only four can be standing at a time and they can only stand up for a maximum of five seconds. Everyone should participate and try to stand with a group of four.

A sense of community and having a strong focus can be the keys to a successful production (and classroom). This exercise can help to establish those norms in a fun way, which also gets the students up on their feet.

Zounds! Ball
(This exercise requires a soft ball about 8-12 inches in diameter.)
• helps the ensemble/classroom grow together
• helps the students let go of their internal “censor” and begin tapping into their impulses
• brings together the physical and the vocal actor tools
Many actors will tell you that learning the lines is the easy part; making it come out of their mouths as if they're saying it for the very first time is the hard part, especially with Shakespeare. Shakespeare can sound like a song, but how do you make it sound like real people talking to each other? Actors listen to each other and try to respond to what they hear in the moment of the play. Listening is a very important part of acting; it keeps the moment real—and the characters believable.

Stand in a circle facing in. (To the teacher: explain to your students that the ball carries energy with it. This energy is like a feedback loop that increases the energy, speed and focus of the entire group by the amount that each actor-student puts into the ball.) The goal is to keep the ball moving in the circle without letting the energy drop. There should be no space between throw and catch. There should be no thought as to whom you will throw next. To keep the intensity of the energy, as the ball is thrown, make eye contact with the person you are throwing the ball to, and at the moment of release, call out “Zounds!”

“Zounds,” a frequent expletive on the Shakespearean stage, rhymes with “wounds”—and was, in fact, a contraction for “God’s wounds.” The 1606 “Act to Restrain Abuses of Players” prohibited the use of the word “God” on the secular stage of the playhouse.

Experiment with the way you say “Zounds!” It could be loud or soft, in a character voice, or in whatever way they wish, as long as it is impulsive and with energy. Shakespeare has love scenes, sword fights, betrayals and all sorts of relationships in his plays. Actors—in the classroom and on stage—must be able to experiment, follow impulses, and create character without the fear of failure.

**Zounds! Ball (without a ball)**

- encourages students to make their imagination specific and clear to the ensemble
- focuses the students on physical detail

This exercise builds on Zounds! Ball. Take the ball out of the circle and set it aside. Take an imaginary Zounds! Ball out of your pocket. Grow this ball from a tiny rubber ball into a huge balloon. Using “Zounds!” toss the ball to someone in the circle, who must catch it with the same weight and speed with which it was thrown. Whoever holds this imaginary ball must create the ball into a different weight and size, making it clear to the rest of the circle how they’ve changed it. As in Zounds! Ball, work around the circle. The wide range of vocabulary in Shakespeare’s plays can often be intimidating as one reads the scripts. The actor’s job is to make the language clear, and this is often accomplished by very specific physical gesturing.

**Zip Zap Zop!**

- facilitates mental focus
- encourages eye contact and team work
- builds a sense of rhythm and pace

(To the teacher: For a demonstration of this community builder, watch this video, [http://www.tinyurl.com/zipzapzop](http://www.tinyurl.com/zipzapzop), for a demonstration and instructions.) Stand in a circle, facing in. Bring your hands to your chest in a prayer pose. Make sure everyone can see each person in the circle. Eye contact is going to be very important! Point your hands like a laser, make clear eye contact at another person in the circle, and say “zip,” “zap” or “zop,” picking up your cue from the person before you. While maintaining the word sequence of zip, zap, zop as well as the rhythm, start slowly and eventually build speed.

**Wah!**

- facilitates physical awareness and risk-taking
- encourages vocal projection
- helps actors increase their sense of timing and decrease their response time

(To the teacher: Want to see Wah! in action with a group of students? Watch this brief video, [http://www.tinyurl.com/wahwarmup](http://www.tinyurl.com/wahwarmup).) Stand in a circle, facing in. No one in the circle is a student or teacher any longer, but rather a fearsome
warrior. Press the palms of your hands flat together to become a sword. To begin the game, one warrior raises his or her sword straight up, then brings it down, pointing at another warrior in the circle. Warriors must make excellent eye contact to avoid confusion. As the warrior brings down his or her sword, he or she utters a fearsome battle cry, by saying, “Wah!” (Be wary, warriors, of shouting, which comes from the throat and leads to laryngitis, a warrior’s worst enemy. Using the good support and deep breathing from your vocal warm-up will help you keep your vocal chords in top fighting condition.) When you become the recipient of “Wah!,” raise your sword up above your head. While your sword is raised, the warriors on either side of you slash towards her stomach, as they cry “Wah!” in unison. Then make eye contact with someone else in the circle, slash your sword towards them with a final defiant “Wah!” Each “battle” should therefore include three cries of “Wah!” As the group becomes familiar with the game, work to increase your speed and volume.

This is a silly game; remember that warriors don’t care about “looking cool” because they’re too busy fighting unending battles. When a warrior misses his or her cue, stop the round and start it again until everyone is comfortable being loud and making big physical choices.

**What Are You Doing?**

Form two parallel lines, and enough room in between for “action” to take place. The first student in one line, Student A, steps into the empty space between the two lines and begins miming any action (ex. bouncing a basketball). The first student in the opposite line, Student B, steps out and addresses miming Student A, saying their first name (a good name reinforcer!) and asking, “[Name], what are you doing?” Student A then states any action that is not what they are miming (e.g. “baking a cake”). Student B then begins miming the action that Student A has just stated, and the next student steps out to continue the exercise. (To the teacher: Once students feel confident with the exercise, ask students to choose actions found in a chosen text. For instance, if you are teaching *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, students might say, “I'm picking a magic flower” or “I'm performing in a play!”)

Guiding Questions for Community-Builders:

- Why is a sense of trust and community important in theater?
- Are there other activities where an ensemble is important? How might they be similar to theater?
- How is acting in a play similar to being on a sports team? Or a classroom?
- Why might mental focus be important in acting?

If at any point an activity breaks down or the group “messes up,” try this: ask the class to raise their arms to the sky in unison with a big, “Yay!!!!” By making this a classroom practice, you can support risk-taking and celebrate the notion that making mistakes is part of the learning process of any activity. It also helps keep the energy of the activity moving forward. Instead of the class devolving into giggles and finger-pointing when a mistake occurs, you can quickly acknowledge the “mess up,” celebrate it, and be ready to jump right back in without missing a beat. This will take some practice for students, but once they get it, these hiccups will become simply part of the activity itself—and a great way to build community and spirit in the classroom at the same time! (Thank you to Professor Catherine Weidner, the School of Theatre at DePaul University, for this excellent ensemble-building tip!)
Chicago Shakespeare Theater

**Chicago Shakespeare Theater's website**
http://www.chicagoshakes.com/education

Access articles and teacher handbooks for eighteen of Shakespeare’s plays, as well as information on introducing your students to Shakespeare in performance.

Comprehensive Link Sites

**Shakespeare in Europe Sh:i:n:E**
http://shine.unibas.ch/metasite.html

Access an array of web links categorized into criticism, theater and film, music, adaptation, education, and more. Website created and maintained by Basel University in Switzerland.

**Touchstone Database**
http://touchstone.bham.ac.uk

This website database identifies and maps significant UK Shakespeare collections. Created and maintained by University of Birmingham in the UK.

**Absolute Shakespeare**
http://absoluteshakespeare.com

Access a comprehensive collection of Shakespeare's work, including full texts and summaries, a timeline, and lists of film adaptations.

Teaching Shakespeare

**The Folger Shakespeare Library**
http://folger.edu/education

This website features lesson plans, primary sources and study guides for the most frequently taught plays and sonnets.

**Teaching Shakespeare with Technology—PBS**
http://pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/technology

Learn more about incorporating digital media into your Shakespeare units.

**The History of Costume by Braun and Schneider**
http://siue.edu/COSTUMES/history.html

View costume illustrations of different social classes and cultures from various historical times.
A Midsummer Night’s Dream

**BBC’s 60-second Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night’s Dream**  
http://bbc.co.uk/drama/shakespeare/60secondshakespeare/themes_midsummer.shtml  
An engaging introduction to the play, this site is written in the format of exclusive breaking news on the front page of a newspaper.

**BBC Shakespeare Animated Tales A Midsummer Night’s Dream**  
http://tinyurl.com/bbcanimatedtalespart1  
This animated version of the play covers the entire story in about 20 minutes. Part 1 of 2 is currently available on Youtube.

**Touchstone Online Exhibition: Peter Brook’s 1970 Production**  
http://touchstone.bham.ac.uk/exhibition/MND/home.html  
This site includes production photos from this important production, as well as an explanation of plot and theme.

**A Teacher Guide to the Signet Edition**  
This teachers’ guide provides summaries of each act in addition to study questions to consider while reading the play and follow up writing prompts.

**Elizabethan Wedding Customs**  
http://william-shakespeare.info/elizabethan-wedding-customs.htm  
This is a useful resource for comparing today’s customs of marriage to those during the Elizabethan era.

**Hermia’s Diary**  
http://hermiasdiary.blogspot.com/  
This is a 2010 blog written as though it is Hermia’s diary.

**Pyramus and Thisbe as told by The Beatles**  
http://tinyurl.com/beatlespyramusandthisbe  
In 1964, The Beatles acted in a televised skit of Pyramus and Thisbe. Hilarity ensues!

**Shakespeare Unlocked**  
http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01dtvpl/features/dream  
Shakespeare Unlocked offers insights into character, dramatic devices and interpretative choices through performance. Three scenes from the play are shown and then explored by actors and directors in workshops.
Shakespeare and Elizabethan England

**The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust**
http://shakespeare.org.uk

Learn more about Shakespeare’s life and birthplace through an extensive online collection of Shakespeare-related materials.

**The Elizabethan Theatre**
http://uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/englisch/shakespeare

Read a lecture on Elizabethan Theatre by Professor Hilda D. Spear, University of Dundee, held at Cologne University.

**Queen Elizabeth I**
http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/eliza.htm

Learn more about Queen Elizabeth and the people, events and concepts relevant to the study of the Elizabethan Age.

**Elizabeth I: Ruler and Legend**
http://newberry.org/elizabeth/

This web-based exhibit is a companion to The Newberry Library’s 2003/2004 Queen Elizabeth exhibit.

**Encyclopedia Britannica’s Guide to Shakespeare**
http://www.britannica.com/shakespeare

An excellent resource for non-fiction companion pieces, find encyclopedia articles on Shakespeare, his works, and the Elizabethan period.

**Texts and Early Editions**

**The Complete Works of William Shakespeare**
http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/works.html

Access the first online web edition of the complete works, created and maintained by Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto**
http://bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/homepage.html

A copy of the quartos, available to compare side-by-side, as well as background information. This website was created and is maintained by the British Library.

**The Internet Shakespeare Editions**
http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Foyer/plays.html

This website has transcriptions and high quality facsimiles of Shakespeare’s folios and quartos, categorized by play with links to any articles written about the play that can be found on the website.

**Furness Shakespeare Library**
http://dewey.lib.upenn.edu/sceti/furness/

This collection of primary and secondary texts and images that illustrate the theater, literature, and history of Shakespeare. Created and maintained by University of Pennsylvania.
What Is a Folio?
http://shea.mit.edu/ramparts/newstuff3.htm

This page gives an easy to understand introduction to the Folio texts, part of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's website "Hamlet on the Ramparts."

Words, Words, Words

Shakespeare's Words Glossary and Language Companion
http://shakespearewords.com

Created by David Crystal and Ben Crystal, this site is a free online companion to the best-selling glossary and language companion, Shakespeare's Words.

Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary
http://perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.03.0079

Part of Tufts University's Perseus Digital Library and created by Alexander Schmidt.

Words Shakespeare Invented
http://shakespeare-online.com/biography/wordsinvented.html

This list compiled by Amanda Mabillard has some of the many words Shakespeare created; when you click on the word it directs you to the play in which it first appeared.

Shakespeare in Performance

The Internet Broadway Database
http://ibdb.com

This online database of Broadway plays is a great place to search for 'Shakespeare' and learn about some of the different productions of the Bard’s works. (Note: This will only give you information about shows performed on Broadway.)

The Internet Movie Database: William Shakespeare
http://imdb.com

Similar to IBDB, utilize this online movie database to search for ‘Shakespeare’ and learn about the different cinematic versions of his plays.

Shakespeare's Staging: Shakespeare's Performance and his Globe Theatre
http://shakespearestaging.berkeley.edu

This website catalogues stagings (with images!) from the 16th century to today.

Designing Shakespeare Collections
http://www.ahds.rhul.ac.uk/ahdscollections/docroot/shakespeare/playslist.do

This index page once connected to a now-defunct Arts and Humanities Data Service in the UK. While much of the original site (http://ahds.ac.uk/performingarts) is no longer searchable, this single link offers a treasure trove of production photos focusing on design practice at the Royal Shakespeare Company, along with many other British theaters. The photos can be enlarged and used for a myriad of classroom activities and research.
Shakespeare in Art

**Shakespeare Illustrated**
http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html

Harry Rusche, English professor at Emory University, created this helpful website that explores nineteenth-century paintings that depict scenes from Shakespeare’s plays. Most plays have at least two works of art accompanying them; you can search for works of art by both play title and artist name.

**Absolute Shakespeare**
http://absoluteshakespeare.com/pictures/shakespeare_pictures.htm

View examples of paintings based on Shakespeare’s works and features examples of text believed to have inspired the painting.

**The Faces of Elizabeth I**
http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/elizface.htm

Access a collection of paintings of Queen Elizabeth spanning her lifetime.

**Tudor England: Images**
http://marileecody.com/images.html

Peruse paintings of royalty from the Tudor Era.

From Left: Michael Aaron Lindner, Ron Orbach, Richard Manera, Rod Thomas and Levenix Riddle as the Rude Mechanicals in CST’s 2012 Production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Directed by Gary Griffin
Barber, C.L. “May Games and Metamorphoses on a Midsummer Night” from Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy. Princeton, 1959. This chapter provides insight into the Elizabethan Midsummer rituals and the context around which Shakespeare might have imagined his play.


_www.chicagoshakes.com_

Frye, Northrop. *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Romance and Comedy.* San Diego, 1965. Frye’s work is a classic in Shakespearean scholarship, and serves still as an excellent lens through which to understand Shakespeare’s comedies.


Gibson, Rex. *Teaching Shakespeare.* Cambridge, 1998. As “missionary” and inspiration to the “active Shakespeare” movement worldwide, Rex Gibson compiles into one incomparable resource activities that encourage students to playfully and thoughtfully engage with Shakespeare’s language and its infinite possibilities.

Goddard, Harold C. *The Meaning of Shakespeare.* Chicago, 1951. This classic critical analysis, which is both readable and humanistic, devotes a chapter to each play in the canon.

Griffiths, Trevor R. *Shakespeare in Production: A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Cambridge, 1996. This excellent series, still available for only a few titles, combines the complete text with copious historical notes on production choices from the sixteenth to twenty-first centuries. It’s a great resource for a teacher interested in performance choices.


Hawkins, Harriet. *Twayne's New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare.* Boston, 1987. This very reliable, accessible series of Shakespearean criticism is a good resource for many plays in the canon. Each is a single scholar’s voice, as opposed to a compilation of various shorter essays.


Krueger, Ellen, and Mary T. Christel. *Seeing and Believing: How to Teach Media Literacy in the English Classroom.* Portsmouth, NH, 2001. Providing the vocabulary of film analysis, this resource helps acquaint teachers will various ways to teach film adaptations as a cinematic text.


McFadden, Mark. *The Course of True Love: A Workshop Approach to A Midsummer Night's Dream.* New South Wales, 1992. This easy-to-photocopy resource is part of a series published by St. Clair Press, including most of Shakespeare’s most frequently taught plays. The activities encourage an active exploration of the script.


Naremore, James. *Film Adaptation.* New Brunswick, NJ, 2000. The opening chapters outline the strategies that filmmakers use in adapting literature into film, which include “cinema as digest” and issues of fidelity to the literary source.
SUGGESTED READINGS


O’Brien, Peggy. Shakespeare Set Free. New York, 1993. The Folger Library’s revamping of teaching practice, encapsulated in this three-volume set (Midsummer is included in the first of three books) has helped teachers approach Shakespeare as the performative script it was written to be.


Partridge, Eric. Shakespeare’s Bawdy. London, 2000. Not for the prudish, Partridge’s classic work offers an alphabetical glossary of the sexual and scatological meanings of Shakespeare’s language. It will help the reader (including even the most Shakespeare-averse) understand another reason for this playwright’s broad appeal on stage.


Rosenthal, Daniel. Shakespeare on Screen. London, 2000. This lavishly illustrated book traces the development of cinematic adaptation by focusing on plays that have been made into films several times. It is an excellent resource to locate different adaptations, and to gain insight into the filmmaking and adaptation process.

Salomone, Ronald E., and James E. Davis. Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-first Century. Athens, 1997. This collection of essays by high school teachers and college professors offers a wide range of strategies to teach Shakespeare, including several essays on the use of film and film adaptation in the classroom.

indicates a focus on methods for teaching Shakespeare through film
Shakespeare and the art of theater open up many and varied paths of learning. Through one of the largest arts-in-education programs in the entire country, Team Shakespeare brings Shakespeare’s works to life for middle and high school students. Team Shakespeare is an expansive effort to share Shakespeare with young people and to celebrate the work of this great playwright, who embraced the limitless scope of imagination and the exploration of our complex human nature.

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PRINCIPAL ANNUAL SUPPORT FOR TEAM SHAKESPEARE IS ALSO PROVIDED BY
Baxter International Inc., the Helen Brach Foundation, The Brinson Foundation, Crown Family Philanthropies,
The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, James and Brenda Grusecki, The Grover Hermann Foundation,
Illinois Tool Works, K&L Gates LLP, KPMG, Northern Trust, Nuveen Investments, Shelia Penrose and Ernie Mahaffey,
The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, and Anonymous donors.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING IS COURTESY OF Joyce Chelberg, JCCC Foundation,
Mazza Foundation, People’s Gas, Dr. Scholl Foundation, Charles and M.R. Shapiro Foundation,

This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency

MAJOR 2013/14 SEASON SUPPORTERS

American Airlines  BMO Harris Bank  Boeing
ComEd  Hyatt  J.P.Morgan  Land O’Frost

Lead individual and foundation support provided by Best Portion Foundation, Eric’s Tazmanian Angel Fund,
Susan and Lew Manilow, Raymond and Judy McCaskey, Sheli Z. and Burton X. Rosenberg and Donna Van Eekeren Foundation.