

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Stratford
FESTIVAL

2021 STUDY GUIDE

A Midsummer Night's Dream

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
DIRECTED BY PETER PASYK

TOOLS FOR TEACHERS
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A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM STUDY GUIDE

ABOUT THE PLAY

A Midsummer Night's Dream

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Peter Pasyk

A Midsummer Night's Dream House Program

Grade and Curriculum Connections

- Grades 7+
- Global Competencies: Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Learning to Learn/ Self-Awareness
- The Arts
- English
- Language
- Health and Physical Education
- Social Sciences and Humanities

Content Advisory

Deals with mature themes including sexual desire and scenes of staged intimacy

Synopsis

Spellbound lovers, quarrelling fairies, tradesmen with a fervour for amateur theatricals: they're all mixed up together in the surreal world of Shakespeare's great comedy of dreaming and desire. This deep dive into the sometimes unsettlingly dark and dangerous realms of the subconscious famously culminates in a play within the play: a hilariously inept performance by Nick Bottom and his fellow would-be actors. But even as we laugh at the ham-fisted efforts of these "rude mechanicals," we are won over by their heartfelt belief in the power of the imagination. Taking its cue from that insight, this production deploys the most fundamental techniques of theatrical art in a magically inventive staging of a play that is itself a celebration of the imagination at its most extreme.

Themes and Motifs

- Conscious and Subconscious Lives
 - Dreams
 - Imagination
 - Appearance and Reality
 - Magic
- Power and Freedom
 - Self-Determination
 - Gender, Love and Relationships
 - Nature and Exploration

- Transformation
 - Identity
 - Order and Disorder
 - Storytelling and Playmaking

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pre-Show

- What can our dreams tell us about ourselves?
- What are the qualities of a Shakespearean comedy?
- What is love?
- What makes a good relationship between parent and child? Between friends? Between lovers?
- Do you believe in magic? Why or why not?
- How are our identities influenced by our families, communities and social norms and values?
- What causes generational conflict? What drives social and cultural change?
- What is the purpose of staging a play?

Post-Show

- What do the city and the forest each represent in the play? How do social norms and values change between these two settings? What impact do these changes have on the characters?
- In your opinion, who was the most powerful character in the play? Why?
- Which character changed the most over the course of the play? Why do you think this is the case?
- What was your experience of the imagery of nature in the play?
- How did the doubling in the cast impact your experience? What insights did it give you about the characters?
- What is the function of the Mechanicals in the play?
- How can seeing or making plays lead to changes in ourselves and in the larger world?
- What did you think about the ending of the play? Was it a happy one? Why or why not?

MINDS ON

Objective: This exercise invites students to learn more about the world of the play and the particular barriers facing Hermia.

Materials: Access to the text excerpt from Act 1, Scene 1 (below)

Directions:

- Remind students that this excerpt is between Theseus, the Duke of Athens, and Hermia, an Athenian citizen. Hermia's father, Egeus, has brought a complaint forward to Theseus because she refuses to marry Demetrius according to his wishes, going against the laws of Athens. Hippolyta, Lysander and Demetrius are also present for this conversation. It takes place at the very beginning of the play.
- Read the excerpt together aloud.
- Ask students to share or note down what they notice in terms of power and gender.
- Invite students to respond to the debriefing questions independently, in conversation with a partner or in small groups, or in a written reflection.

Act 1, Scene 1

THESEUS What say you, Hermia? Be advised, fair maid:
To you your father should be as a god;
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA So is Lysander.

THESEUS In himself he is;
But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
The other must be held the worthier.

HERMIA I would my father look'd but with my eyes.

THESEUS Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.

HERMIA I do entreat your grace to pardon me.
I know not by what power I am made bold,
But I beseech your grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case,
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

THESEUS To die the death.
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires;

Hermia goes to speak, but is interrupted.

Take time to pause, and by the next new moon
The wedding day betwixt my love and me,
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would.

Debriefing Questions:

- What does this scene tell us about the world of the play? What kind of a place is Athens, particularly for young women?
- If you were one of Hermia's friends, what advice would you give her? How would you help?
- If you were Hermia, what would you do?
- What do you think Lysander is thinking during the scene? Why doesn't he say anything?
- What do you imagine Hermia was going to say to Theseus before he continued speaking?

CONNECTION TO THE ARCHIVES

The Stratford Festival has produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream* more than 15 times! This archival piece is a mask from the 1976 production and shows how the character Bottom (as a donkey) was represented onstage. How does this compare to the way this character appeared in the 2021 production?



The Stratford Festival's Archives maintains, conserves and protects recent and historical records about the Festival and makes those materials available to people around the world. Our multi-media archival holdings date from 1952 and extend through to contemporary materials. We house correspondence, production records, Board minutes, photography, design artwork, scores, audio-visual records, costumes, props and set decoration, press releases and other promotional materials: these document the processes that bring a production to the stage and reflect all aspects of mounting a play, from the administrative to the creative and beyond.

In addition to visiting the Archives in person, you can explore our [online catalogue](#).

RESOURCES

[A Midsummer Night's Dream Showstarters](#)

O'Brien, Peggy, ed. *Shakespeare Set Free. Book One: Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, and A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 1993.

Olster, Fredi and Rick Hamilton. *Discovering Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 1996.

Thompson, Ayanna and Laura Turchi. *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach*. 2016.

Contact us to book a streamed viewing of this production for your class: groups@stratfordfestival.ca