



Outreach & Education Department

A GUIDE TO THE STUDY OF

the *Shakespeare To Go* 2012 Production of

A Midsummer Night's Shakespeare

CONTENTS:

PART ONE: *General Information*

"The Play's The Thing"

The World of William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's Language

PART TWO: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The Characters

Quests and Questions: stuff to consider before seeing the play

Sights and Insights: stuff to consider after you have seen the play

PART THREE: *A Glossary of Terms*

PART FOUR: *On-line Resources*

PART ONE

"The Play's The Thing"

Teachers - You may know Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the **Shakespeare To Go** performance is called *A Midsummer Night's Shakespeare*.

What your students will see is a 45-minute version of Shakespeare's play with narration and plenty of physical comedy.

There are scenes from the play itself using Shakespeare's language.

There are narrative moments where actors will creatively "explain" to the audience what is taking place in the story.

There are also several teaching moments where Shakespeare's language is used to teach the use of context clues, figures of speech such as metaphor, simile and even the correct use of who and whom.

We hope this version of Shakespeare's most accessible play will help introduce your students to the Bard as well as help them understand key grade-level concepts from the Standard Course of Study.

And now... on with the show.



*WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
HIS WORK, AND HIS ERA*



THE WORLD OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare, the English [playwright](#) (words that appear in **bold** type in this study guide are linked to the glossary in Part Four below), was christened April 26, 1564, and according to an inscription on his tomb died April 23, 1616. Although the exact date of his birth is not recorded, it is traditional to celebrate his life on April 23.

Shakespeare lived in years that spanned a fundamental change in world-view. Shakespeare experienced, or knew people who experienced, the Protestant Reformation, the exploration and colonization of a New World, the establishment of the Copernican theory, and the fundamental philosophical shift toward a human-centered universe: for as our understanding of the world changed, so did our understanding of ourselves in it.



Great Britain

Although William Shakespeare grew up in the small town of Stratford-upon-Avon in south-central England, he spent his professional years in London, the capital of a vibrant new empire.



British Postage Stamps depicting The Swan, The Rose, The Hope, and the two Globe Theaters

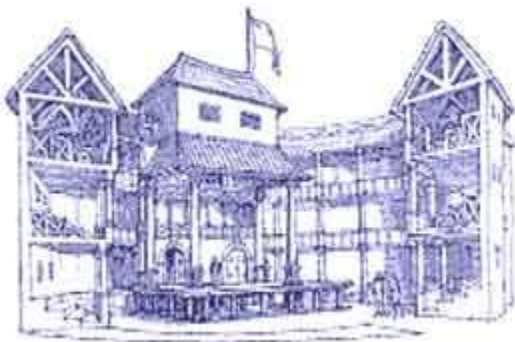
King James I

Not all Britons were enthusiastic about the theater and there have always been those who oppose the theater on moral or religious grounds. Even in Shakespeare's time, when London was full of people from all walks of life who went to see plays, there were those who tried to suppress the theaters as much as they could. Theaters were always closed during outbreaks of contagious diseases and Shakespeare and his company occasionally had to perform out in the countryside. Shakespeare wrote, in addition to the 37 or 38 plays attributed to him, many [sonnets](#) and some longer poems. Some scholars think that Shakespeare treated these other writings as an opportunity to pick up some extra cash when the company could not perform.

Shakespeare was clearly a very successful theater professional, writing plays, acting, and investing in his theater company. When he returned to Stratford toward the end of his life he had become a man of considerable means, and when he died he left his widow and children a respectable estate.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was written early in Shakespeare's career between 1594 and 1596.

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE



In Shakespeare's theater, his characters speak in ways that may seem very intense to our twenty-first century ears. Shakespeare's language sounds the way it does because it carries a burning intensity of feeling, an unfettered imagination, and a profound depth of meaning. Although very intense, Shakespeare's English is *our* English and in the mouths of skillful actors can be understood with little difficulty. It is a language to be heard, not silently read, and simply reading passages aloud can uncloak some of its mystery.

Not only was Shakespeare writing in Modern English, he took liberties and had fun with language. Imagine our vocabulary without words such as: *addiction; amazement; bedroom; blanket; champion; cold-blooded; dawn; elbow; eyeball; gossip; lonely; moonbeam; torture; unreal; worthless; and zany*. In all, Shakespeare added some 1700 words to our language!

Some suggestions for approaching the language you will hear:

First of all, remember that those elaborate phrases you see on the page as you try to *read* the plays will be *spoken* by actors who will have spent considerable time coming to an understanding of what the words mean. Remember also that plays in *performance* offer a context for the words in the form of settings, action, gesture, and costumes. A word that may seem confusing *on the page* may be more easily understood *on the stage*.

And finally: As you enter the theater remember that Shakespeare's characters do not use words merely to express facts or feelings. Their words must accomplish the creation of the world of the play. Listen for the characters not only to tell you where they are and what time the time of day is, but also to argue for their worldview and attempt to impose that vision not only on the other characters, but also on you.



A view of the stage of the rebuilt Globe as it stands now, London, England.

PART TWO

A Midsummer Night's Dream

By William Shakespeare

"Lord, what fools these mortals be"

Who's Who

Teachers - What follows is a list of all the characters in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Some of these characters have been edited out of the **Shakespeare To Go** 45-minute version. However, if students read these character descriptions they will get a very good sense of the story and be ready to see the show.

The Fairy World



Titania and Bottom in a production of A Midsummer Night's Dream by the Royal Shakespeare Company

PUCK, also known as Robin Goodfellow, **Oberon**'s servant. He loves to play pranks on humans.

OBERON, the king of the fairies. He is very angry with his wife **Titania**, because she will not give him a young boy to be his knight.

TITANIA, the queen of the fairies.

COBWEB, **MUSTARDSEED**, **PEASEBLOSSOM** and **MOTE** , fairies all loyal to **Titania**.

The Court



Helena, Demetrius, Hermia and Lysander being watched by Oberon and Puck from the Royal Shakespeare Co.

THESEUS, the Duke of Athens. He is the ruler of Athens and is engaged to be married to the Queen of the Amazons, **Hippolyta**. He cannot wait to get married.

HIPPOLYTA, the Queen of the Amazons. She is engaged to be married to **Duke Theseus**. She is a little nervous about this whole marriage thing.

LYSANDER, a young man who lives in Athens. He is in love with **Hermia**, but he can not marry her because her father **Egeus**, wants her to marry another guy named **Demetrius**.

DEMETRIUS, a young man in Athens. He plans to marry **Hermia**.

HERMIA, a young woman, who is a little bit short. She is in love with **Lysander**, but her father is a total control freak and wants her to marry **Demetrius**. Demetrius? Yuck!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

HELENA, a young woman, who is a bit on the tall side. She is so in love with **Demetrius**, but she can't marry him, because her best friend **Hermia**'s father wants Demetrius to marry her.

EGEUS, the father of Hermia. He thinks Demetrius is a great guy and will be a wonderful husband for his daughter.

PHILOSTRATE, the emcee at the big party after **Duke Theseus**' wedding to **Hippolyta**.

The "Rude Mechanicals"



The performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe" from Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

NICK BOTTOM, a weaver, but also thinks he is a fantastic, marvelous, brilliant, genius, totally awesome actor. He is going to be in **Peter Quince**'s play, which is going to be performed before the Duke. He thinks he should definitely play all the parts.

PETER QUINCE, the director and writer of the play, "Pyramus and Thisby", which hopefully will be performed before the Duke and Duchess after their wedding. It is a great honor to have his play performed before royalty, but he has amateur actors and is a little nervous about it going well.

FRANCIS FLUTE, a bellows-mender. He wants to be a really cool action hero in the play, because he is growing a beard.

ROBIN STARVELING, a tailor. He is older than most of the other actors in the play and has no real acting experience.

TOM SNOOT, the tinker. He has no acting experience, and honestly, is not all that smart.

SNUG, the joiner. He has never been in a play, and is really scared about learning all his lines.

PHILOSTRATE, the emcee at the big party after **Duke Theseus**' wedding to **Hippolyta**.

Quests and Questions: Before seeing the play



One of the best scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe" by Quince, Bottom and the other amateur actors.

Before you go to see the play, ask students to make a list of how the audience is supposed to act at a play. What should the audience do during a play? What should an audience NOT do during a play? Does the audience have any responsibilities?

Then ask students to make a list of what actors are supposed to do during a play. What are their responsibilities onstage during the show? What should actors NOT do during a show?

Sights and Insights: After seeing the play

In *A Midsummer Night's Shakespeare*, your students just saw Quince, Bottom, Flute and the others perform "Pyramus and Thisbe." Ask students to look at their lists of Do's and Don'ts for Audience and Actors; the lists they made before seeing the show.

Now, ask them to list how Theseus, the audience for "Pyramus and Thisbe," acted during the play? Was he respectful? Did he laugh when he was supposed to laugh?

Make another list of how the actors behaved during Pyramus and Thisbe. Did they carry out the responsibilities of good actors? What did they do different that was designed to make us laugh?

Wrapping Up - Talk to students about the relationship between actors and audiences. Ask them if they find theatre more exciting because it is live and anything can happen.

PART THREE

A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Context Clues: A method by which the meanings of unknown words may be learned by looking at the parts of a sentence surrounding the word for definition/explanation clues.

Iambic pentameter: A form of verse that appears very commonly in Shakespeare's plays and in other plays from the same era. In iambic pentameter verse, the language tends to fall into lines of ten syllables, with the even numbered syllables having more stress than the odd numbered syllables. Shakespeare became a master of this verse form and the variations he devised give his pentameter a wonderful variety within the form. When a passage of iambic pentameter does not rhyme, the passage is said to be in "blank verse."

Metaphor: A figure of speech where you use two nouns and compare or contrast them to one another.

Playwright: A builder of plays. The "wright" part of this word is a form of the word "wrought" as in "What hath God *wrought*," or "wrought iron." Note that the word is not *playwrite* because plays are considered to be *constructed*, not just *written*.

Simile: A figure of speech that expresses a resemblance of things of different kinds, usually using "like" or "as."

Sonnet: A brief poem. The word literally means "little song." Shakespeare left us 154 of them that are always published in the same order. So, for example, when someone says "Sonnet 116," we all know which one they are talking about. Almost all of them are fourteen lines long. (You can win a bet by knowing which sonnet is *not* fourteen lines long. There's one with fourteen lines and an extra "introductory line," but it is not the really odd one.) Shakespeare's sonnets follow a very restrictive form. Not only are they all (except the odd one) fourteen lines long, they all rhyme in a particular pattern (except for the odd one). Each line is in **iambic pentameter**. The poems are almost like little puzzles full of word play and complex logic, and some are exquisitely beautiful.



Titania and Bottom in a production by England's Shakespeare 4 Kidz'

PART FOUR

ON-LINE RESOURCES

It is easy to search the internet for information about William Shakespeare. Just type “Shakespeare” into your search engine and tens of thousands of sites come up. Here are some that we found helpful.

www.shakespeares-globe.org *The website of the newly reconstructed Globe Theatre in London*

<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/> *The complete works of Shakespeare in a format that you can copy and paste for your own use*

www.shakespeare.com *A basic collection of Shakespearean facts presented in an easy, non-scholarly format.*

www.shakespeare.org.uk *This is the site run by the Shakespeare Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon in the UK. Lots of stuff about the real estate associated with Shakespeare.*

www.bardweb.net *A good sight for homework help. Lots of general information, plot summaries, and so on. Also links.*

www.folger.edu *The website of the famous Folger Library in Washington DC. Lots of primary source material and lesson plans for teachers.*