

**A Taste of Shakespeare**

**A Midsummer  
Night's Dream**

•Teacher's Guide•

The Eugenia Foundation and Bullfrog Films

# **Teacher's Companion to**

## ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***

### **Program Description**

*A Taste of Shakespeare* is a thought provoking series of videotapes in which actors play the great scenes in Elizabethan English, but comment on the action in the language of today. Each video is under an hour in length and serves to introduce the play to high school and college students. After watching the video, students are encouraged to place themselves in the circumstance of each major character, and are asked to determine how they themselves would feel and behave. This exercise in empathy prepares students for a more detailed study of the play; and opens their minds to a greater appreciation of Shakespeare's language and ideas.

### **Production Notes for *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

Because *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a romantic comedy, it obeys certain conventions. But since it was written by Shakespeare it undercuts the conventions even while seeming to observe them. A romantic comedy usually centres on a pair of lovers in a difficult situation who overcome the obstacles that separate them, and end up getting married and

living happily ever after. In Shakespeare's play we find multiple lovers, including a reluctant bride taken captive in war, a married couple fighting over custody of a child, and two conventional young couples who keep falling in love with each others' partners. Although the couples get appropriately sorted out, and they all get married at the end of the play, their cruel treatment of each other in the midnight forest makes us wonder how long the "happy ending" will last.

Most productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* gloss over disturbing aspects of the story by presenting hurtful scenes as comedy. This makes the audience assume that the lovers will indeed live happily ever after. But we believe that the pain felt by Hermia and Helena when they are coldly rejected must be acknowledged, because it is an integral aspect of the play. We also feel that Hippolyta's reluctance to reward Theseus with love after he conquers her people and takes her captive should be respected. We therefore insist on keeping the ending problematic.

How to portray the fairy world is always a nice challenge in any production of this play. With the help of special effects, we keep as close as we can to Shakespeare's requirement that fairies be small enough to "creep into acorn cups," but large enough to make love to a human being. Our fairies, therefore, change size at will. Since they are forest fairies, we clothed them in forest green; except for Titania who - as queen of the night - wears black, with garlands of white forest

flowers.

Although Puck exclaims the signature line of the play: “Lord, what fools these mortals be!”, both Oberon and Puck are clearly affected by the cruel behavior they observe among the earthling lovers, and they try to make things right.

Oberon’s tricking Titania into falling in love with the ass-headed Bottom does no one any harm, and gives Bottom the love experience of his life. These fairies, though prone to playing tricks - on each other as well as on humans - are essentially benevolent creatures who add a dimension of beauty and enchantment to the play. Their power to influence weather (lines II.1.88-117 in the text) should be noted in a study of the play, but is not included in our 55 minute abridgment.

## **Characters and Cast in order of Appearance**

### **Lovers:**

**Theseus** (Brian Tree) - legendary Greek hero and ruler of Athens

**Hippolyta** (Soo Garay) - captured queen of the Amazons

**Narrator** (Nicky Guadagni) - a person we put into Shakespeare’s play to clarify our shortened version of the story and to comment on characters and issues.

**Hermia** (Tara Rosling) - a young woman in love with Lysander. Her father will not let her marry the man she loves, but insists that she marry someone

else. The father does not appear in our abridgment of the text.

**Lysander** (Frank Zotter) - a young man in love with, and loved by, Hermia.

**Demetrius** (Sergio Di Zio) - another young man in love with Hermia, whom her father insists she marry.

**Helena** (Stephanie Belding) - a young woman in love with Demetrius, who used to love her but now wants to marry Hermia.

### Tradesmen:

**Peter Quince** (Sean Sullivan) - a carpenter - in charge of rehearsing the other tradesmen for a performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

**Nick Bottom** (Eric Weinthal) - a weaver - who plays Pyramus.

**Francis Flute** (Lynne Griffin) - a bellows-mender - who plays Thisbe.

**Tom Snout** (Brett Heard) - a tinker - who plays Wall.

**Snug** ( Jack Newman) - a joiner - who plays Lion.

### Powerful Fairies:

**Titania/Narrator** (Nicky Guadagni) - Queen of the Fairies.

**Oberon** (Daniel Kash) - King of the Fairies.

**Puck** (Kate Hennig) - a mischievous fairy who carries out Oberon's orders.

### **Attendant Fairies :**

Stella Rotstein  
Isabel Rotstein  
Ruby Smith-Merovitz  
Ariel Smith-Merovitz  
Maia Smith-Merovitz  
Tess Bengner  
Gualtiero Cavaliere

### **Key Production Personnel**

Director - Dug Rotstein  
Writer/Producer - Eric Weinthal  
Producer - Ada Craniford  
Executive Producer - Doug Craniford  
Art Director - Teresa Przybylski  
Director of Photography - David Patrick  
Music Composed and Performed by Rusty  
McCarthy

**Key Scenes Presented in the Videotape** - edited to fit a 55 minute format. Line numbering from the New Penguin Shakespeare.

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| I.1.16   | “Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword ,”          |
| I.1.234  | “Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,” |
| I.2.1    | “Is all our company here?”                         |
| II.1.60  | “Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania!”             |
| II.1.146 | “Well, go thy way...”                              |
| II.1.188 | “I love thee not, therefore pursue me              |

- not.”
- II.1.245 “Fare thee well, nymph.”
- II.1.249 “I know a bank where the wild  
thyme blows,”
- II.2.33 “What thou seest when thou dost  
wake,”
- II.2.41 “Fair love, you faint with wandering  
in the wood”
- II.2.72 “Through the forest have I gone,”
- II.2.96 “But who is here?”
- II.2.131 “Help me, Lysander, help me! Do  
thy best...”
- III.1.2 “Here's a marvelous convenient  
place...”
- III.1.121 “What angel wakes me from my  
flowery bed?”
- III.2.102 “Flower of this purple dye,”
- III.1.122 “Why should you think that I should  
woo in scorn?”
- III.2.181 “Thou art not by mine eye,  
Lysander, found”
- III.2.366 “Then crush this herb into  
Lysander's eye - “
- IV.1.1 “Come sit thee down upon this  
flowery bed”
- IV.1.45 “...Seest thou this sweet sight?”
- IV.1.126 “...what nymphs are these?”
- IV.1. 203 “I have had a most rare vision.”
- V.1.108 “If we offend, it is with our good  
will.”
- V.1.280 “This passion, and the death of a  
dear friend,”
- V.1.353 “The iron tongue of midnight hath  
told twelve.”

- V.1. 361            “Now the hungry lion roars”  
V.1.413            “If we shadows have offended,”

### **Classroom Activities:**

#### **A. What would you do under the following circumstances?**

1. Your father refuses to let you marry the guy you love, but insists that you marry the guy your best friend is crazy about. Your father takes you to court, and the judge says you have to do as he says, or become a nun.
2. One moment the guy (girl) you love doesn't want anything to do with you; the next moment he (she) vows undying passion.
3. Your boyfriend (girlfriend) asks you to spend the night in the forest with him (her).
4. You have a nightmare, and you wake up to find it really happening.
5. You think that your best friend has seduced your boyfriend (girlfriend).
6. After being really cruel to you, and calling you all kinds of names, your boyfriend (girlfriend) suddenly says, “Let's get married.”
7. The most beautiful, desirable woman you have ever seen suddenly expresses overwhelming love for you.
8. You see cute little flying people in the air around you.
9. You are supposed to meet the person you love at a certain place and time; but when you get there, all you see is his/her blood-soaked coat lying on the



ground..

10. You have promised to marry someone you don't love and it's the day of the wedding.

## **B. Essay or Discussion Topics**

1. What kind of evidence would convince you that a certain flower could make a person fall in or out of love. Do you think it would be ethical to use this flower if you found it?

2. Re-tell Shakespeare's story of Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius and Helena, keeping the main events but removing the influence of fairies or a magic flower. Present convincing motivation for the changes in the lovers' feelings.

3. Research the mythological background of Theseus, Hippolyta, and Hecate as the triple goddess. What does it add to your understanding and enjoyment of the play?

4. Imagine that there really are little flying persons who have the power to help or hurt the human race. Describe who they are, what they do, and how they influence events in the world. If you were one of these little persons, how would you behave?

5. Puck apologizes to the audience at the end of the play. What do you find in the play's so-called "idle theme" that might cause offense? What is the theme of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

**C. Choose your favorite scene in the video; find the scene in your text of the play, act it out, and explain what the characters are thinking and feeling.**

**D. Find and memorize one of the wonderful soliloquies in your text of the play. For example:**

- a) "I know a bank where the wild thyme grows..."
- b) "I have had a most rare vision."
- c) "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet/ Are of imagination all compact."
- d) "Now the hungry lion roars/ And the wolf howls the moon,"
- e) "Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind,"

**E. Examine the images and/or the ideas in the soliloquy you have chosen, and decide in what way these ideas or images are true to reality as you know it.**

### **Recommended Text, and Extra Reading**

The New Penguin Shakespeare edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, edited by Stanley Wells (1967).

The story of Pyramus and Thisbe in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The chapter on Theseus in Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks*.

The play, *Hippolytus*, by Euripides.

The sections on the Amazons and the triple goddess in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*.

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